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PCZONE

ISSUE 216 FEBRUARY 2010



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2009 REVIEW METRO 2033
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BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2
NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR
STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED
THE SABOTEUR WINDOWS 7

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Ninja Turtles what was
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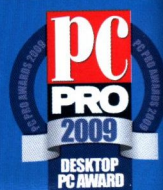
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PCZONE

Contents

In this issue of the
UK's best PC mag...

GOODBYE 2009

CAN IT REALLY be December? Where has the year gone? I know we have Christmas rammed down our throats from September, but this year I'm really looking forward to it anyway.

I had to write this in early December, so I'm imagining what things will be like on 23 December when it hits shops. Will you have got your presents? Will you be at work watching the clock? Will you have stopped emailing to complain about *Modern Warfare 2* not supporting dedicated servers, our 94% score, and having to wait two days to play it, if you got the game on *Steam*? I hope not, as *PC ZONE* remains one of the only places your voice will be heard.

MW2 dominated the last months of 2009, so it's easy to forget the other things that happened over the year, but flick to page 27 for our annual review and you'll see all the highlights and lowlights of the year.

Looking ahead, the start of 2010 is crammed with games like *BioShock 2*, *Supreme Commander 2*, *Just Cause 2*, *Aliens vs Predator*, *Star Trek Online*, *Napoleon: Total War*, *Metro 2033* and this month's cover, *Splinter Cell Conviction* (page 60). We have an exclusive look at the game's co-op, hands-on with the game and exclusive interviews with the dev team.

All that leaves me to say is, have a great Christmas and see you in the New Year. I'll be spending the holidays building snowmen, drinking mulled wine and eating too much turkey!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor

ali.wood@futurenet.com

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See page 44

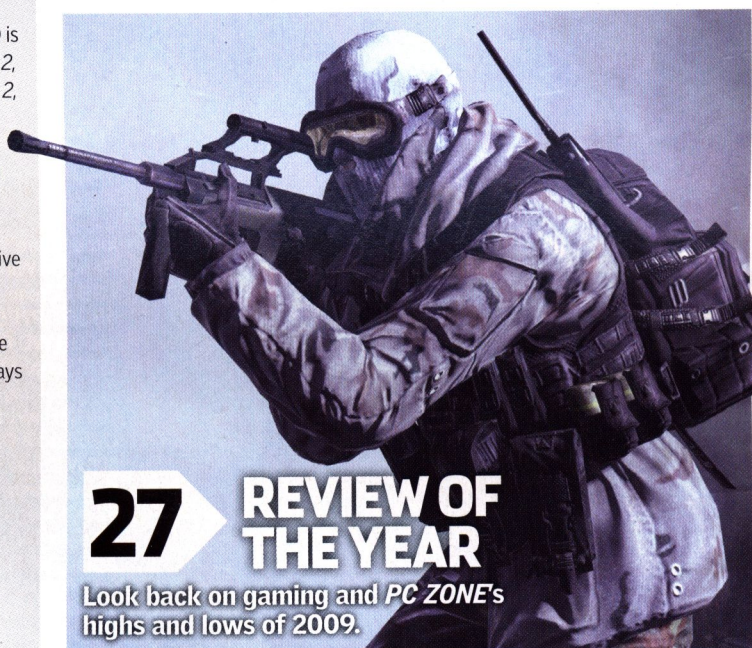


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COVER STORY

SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

This time *Splinter Cell* isn't just about Fisher.
We test *Conviction*'s multiplayer campaign –
possibly the best co-op game we've ever seen!



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REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Look back on gaming and *PC ZONE*'s
highs and lows of 2009.



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STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

This was last year's hit on the consoles.
So how does it fare 12 months on?

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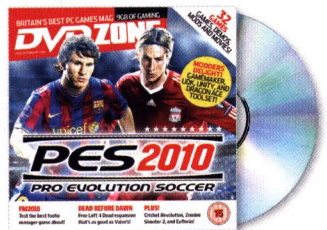
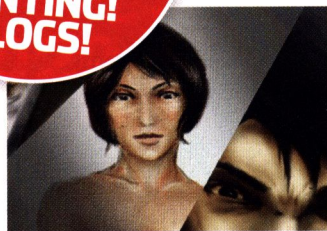
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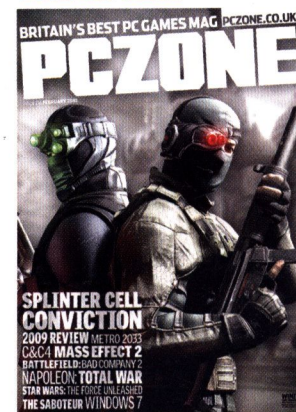
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Help a big shark terrorise
planes, an artist recover his
memory, a naked man cycle,
and learn to spell.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



60 SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

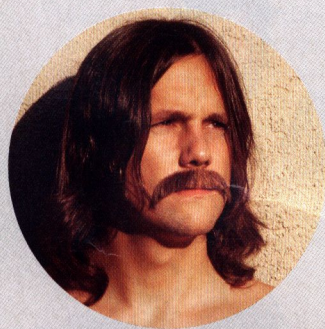
Too busy? PC ZONE in 78 words...

In the last issue of 2009 we look back at the past 12 months in PC gaming; show how well-travelled you readers are; go underground (Russia-style, not The Jam-style); peak at next year's big games; beat a rival magazine in a scrap; sneak around in a catsuit; run about with a lightsaber; blow up Nazis; pretend to be Rocketman; quiz Microsoft; fight loads of zombies; recall a strategic classic; talk Batman; and hang out with Mr T. Phew!



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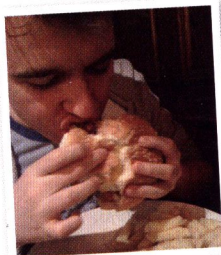
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Closing date: 31 January, 2010.
Full offer details on page 44.

Meet The Team

Here are the ones to thank for **PC ZONE**



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy editor

AGE Still only 22

LIKES Huge burgers

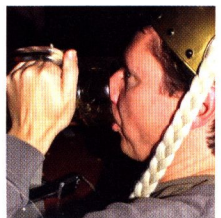
DISLIKES Thierry Henry

FANCIES Germans

FAVOURITE GAME Torchlight

NOW PLAYING Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

A month has passed since Thierry Henry juggled a ball and cheated Ireland out of place in the Pan-Global Football Cup, yet deputy editor and resident Irishman Steve continues his attempts to libel Frenchmen in each article he writes. His insistence that prefixing accusations of infidelity, bestiality and genital deformity with "allegedly" makes them safe to print have fallen on deaf ears, so the cat-shagging, wonky-donged cheater's name remains unsullied in these pages.



STEVE HILL

Poker-faced freelancer

When Hill sent in this issue's NeverQuest it was met by guffaws of disbelief. There was no way that he really met that guy when he returned to Azeroth? Is there?

NOW PLAYING: Poker



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Award-winning freelancer

This month Log got to indulge in one of his favourite hobbies: hanging out with Russians. He does love them. Especially their tall and furry hats.

NOW PLAYING: Left 4 Dead 2



ALI WOOD

Editor

Despite the astoundingly heavy November rains flooding train routes, Ali made it into work every day. Her only problem was finding a spot to park her hovercraft.

NOW PLAYING: Dragon Age

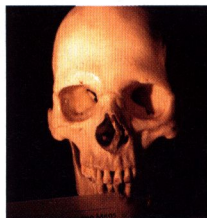


DAVID BROWN

Staff writer

David now sleeps on his desk, lovingly spooning the brand-new PC that was recently delivered. Now if only he'd stop talking dirty to it while the rest of us work.

NOW PLAYING: Dragon Age

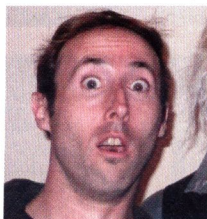


ADAM GLICK

Mysterious freelancer

Leaving the office, Ali met Death. He pointed a sketetal finger at her and whispered, "Where is Glick?" Ali's reply was a shrug. "Bloody typical," Death complained.

NOW PLAYING: DiRT 2



PAVEL BARTER

Special reporter

"Say it. Please say it. Just for me. Please. With a cherry on top." Despite these pleas, Pavel couldn't make Mark Hamill say, "May the Force be with you."

NOW PLAYING: Machinarium

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Absolutely bloody nothing.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Absolutely bloody everything.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

THE WORLD WENT ON 30min Despite the MW2 server debacle, the Earth kept spinning.

WATERFALL Hours Richard complains about his flat's leaking wall.

KLINGONS VS VULCANS 35min The team arguing over which species to pick in Star Trek Online.

WAR CRIMES 3min Apparently in shooters you don't get punished for war crimes. Just like in real life.

WORLD CUP 2hrs Yes the build up has begun. And the PC2 football lovers won't shut up about it.

EA SALE 4min EA cut the price of everything in Battlefield Heroes and people complain! Eh?

2 GETS 2 IN 2 1min Left 4 Dead 2 sells 2 million copies in two weeks. Bravo.

DEATH OF DVD 3min Devs say digital downloads will replace DVDs. That'll work.

"FULL OF STARS" 23min David's new review PC is a 2002's Monolith look-a-like.

ARK TO WORK 7min The rains hit London. And stay for a few days.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW, or by email to letters@pczone.co.uk (set TINY COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of Ghostbusters: The Video Game. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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Letters

Ali Wood wonders if you can guess what most of the letters are about this month



WIN!



This month the King of Letters gets themselves an ASUS GeForce 9800GTX+ 512MB graphics card. It's factory overclocked to 106% of standard, and packs ASUS' Smart Doctor utility to protect itself when you push the overclock. It's also fitted with Enthusiastic's Dark Knight Cooler. In short, this is a damn fine bit of kit.



If it was a pit bull, would anyone care?

KING OF LETTERS

HAPPY SHOOTING

Never mind all the morally conflicted teeth grinding and hand wringing, I've repeatedly had a ball mowing down those pixelated civilian personages in *Modern Warfare 2*'s airport level: it's easy if you imagine they're all bankers and MPs bugging off on expensive holidays paid for by tax-paying mugs like us.

There's even one that looks like our Dear Leader Gordon 'Kim Jong' Brown. I regularly single him out for some special attention.

If only real life was as much fun – unlike the multiplayer server debacle, sigh. Love the mag. You're beautiful – don't ever change.

Slim the Slayer

We received numerous emails about that level with some being surprised at Steve Hill's attitude towards it. Admittedly, it's a sensitive issue for

some, but I know Steve was genuine in his comments, and those who thought it took up too much of the review, it had to be addressed because if we hadn't you lot would've questioned why.

There was also one reader (you know who you are) who thoroughly enjoyed shooting all the civilians and was disappointed he couldn't kill the children! I mean, come on! He did slightly redeem himself by making it clear it's just a game to him, and that he abhorred violence in real life. But I'm with Slim on this one.



US special forces or Empire stormtrooper? It's kind of hard to tell.

MW2 IS SIZEIST

As well as generally shafting PC players with *Modern Warfare 2*, Infinity Ward stated they were imposing a 9x9 player limit on all platforms because that was what the game was balanced for.

In all previous *Call of Duty* games there have been different-sized maps

that logically should support different numbers of players, even though the server size is fixed. Rather than forcing all servers to be locked down at the lower number of players based upon the smaller maps, Infinity Ward could have added a spawn-limit into each map based upon the map size, irrespective of the number of player slots available in the server.

So on the smaller maps, a total of 16 players can spawn with the rest being left in spectator mode. When one player dies, the one waiting the longest gets the option to spawn and so on (Press F1 to spawn or F2 to skip and stay in spectator mode). Similarly, on the medium maps a limit of 24 players spawning could be used.

Except, it isn't about map size is it? It's about limiting the players because IW are forcing us to use peer-to-peer servers on domestic broadband connections with limited bandwidth.

A. Ward

We couldn't review the multiplayer when we did our review last month, but posted our thoughts on our blog, also commenting on the dedicated servers, and why we don't feel that IWNet is the end of PC gaming as we know it.

While such drastic changes can be difficult to stomach initially, I imagine Infinity Ward are expecting PC gamers to come round to their way of doing things eventually.

We did find cheating a huge problem at time of playing though, along with the varying quality of maps. If you missed it head here for a read: snipurl.com/pczblog_mw2.

LETTING OFF STEAM

I have retail disks of *MW2* but I'm unable to enjoy the game on its release date because of a poor install routine hamstrung by the need to run over *Steam*. I've spent the last three hours looking through the boards at *Steam*,

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**"You're not complaining about
Modern Warfare 2? That's
a refreshing change"**



*Ghostbusters: no
airports in sight.*

trying the various workarounds offered by moderators and other helpful souls but so far no joy.

My point is two-fold: in the first instance, I'm used to making PCs work by ferreting around in forums and mucking around with all sorts of settings, but I just can't afford the additional time to resolve this.

Presumably people who buy the game for PC will just want it to work out of the box anyway. I don't think that expectation is either unreasonable or unfair. Sure, there'll be a number whose PC setup may cause conflicts but that's not the impression I get at the moment. Howls of anguish are rife in all the related forums I've visited.

Secondly, while the developers have been polishing what looks like a real gem of a game over the last however many months, what have Valve been doing to ensure a smooth release? There is no evidence of the latter.

Amazon was filled with negative reviews of the game (on account of the lack dedicated servers) for months before release, but I was happy to take no account of this because of my faith as a consumer in Infinity Ward's judgement which has so far been spot on. I would buy the game and judge it on its merits.

Unfortunately, because of the Steam link, that faith has been shaken

and I would imagine Infinity Ward will be left in no doubt about this. The current flaming across lots of boards suggests that I am one of a great many with similar misgivings (if that's not too mild a word).

Gary Pettecrew

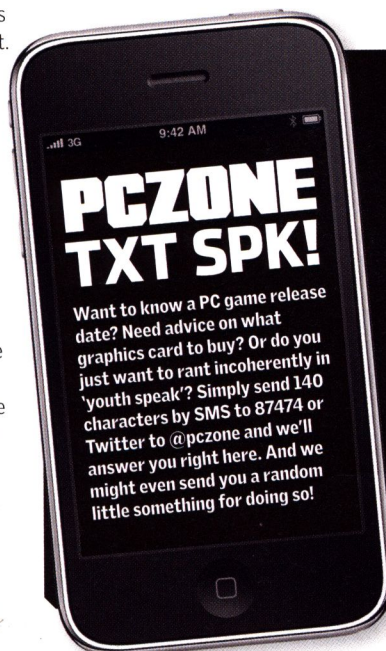
Not having the freedom to game how we like doesn't sit well with us either. Apparently due to fears of another postal strike, many online orders were even sent out before the weekend of MW2's release, so many console owners could complete the game

before it was even officially released, while we PC gamers sat on our hands and waited patiently for the bloody thing to be activated. Epic fail.

WHERE'S TINY?

I'm writing to you because I have just received my latest subscription issue of your magazine.

Within the magazine you have the information on how to enter the Tiny Compo to win a copy of *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*. I would like to enter this competition as I would like to win the game, as



Valve are nasty people, and I feel like a fool for pre-ordering from them.
SammyParker

Not activating MW2 until the Thursday was frustrating. I can understand why you wouldn't pre-order from them again, but I don't actually believe they are 'nasty', just a bit stupid.

Can you start a campaign to get more PC games advertised for the PC primarily, not the Xbox?
Halrick

Sadly, I can't see this happening no matter what we do.

I quoted from *PC ZONE* in my *Tropico* review at Good Old Games. If I win a prize, do I have to give you a cut?
Darth

The cheek of it! Using our words our workers slaved over, just for you to try to snag yourself a prize! For that we expect more than just "a cut".

Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text - and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting *PC ZONE* you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO INFO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate.



MODERN WARFARE 2

Jordan Higgins

PC ZONE SCORE 94%

Modern Warfare 2 has captured real life perfectly, from the way people move to how the guns sound.

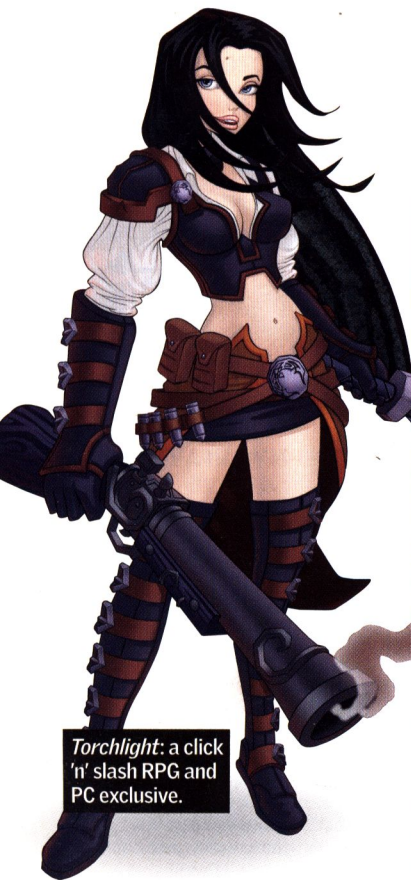
The single-player on it's own is amazing, though a little short it offers lots of action packed mission a small space of time to stop you from getting bored. And if the single-player wasn't enough you then head online to Spec Ops missions. These are amazing and are great for co-op with a friend!

After that you can get to the main part of the game: the online mode. It's amazing fighting against people all around the world, different experiences each time, plenty of maps, and hardly any lag. This game will keep you coming back for years.

YOUR SHOUT 94%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



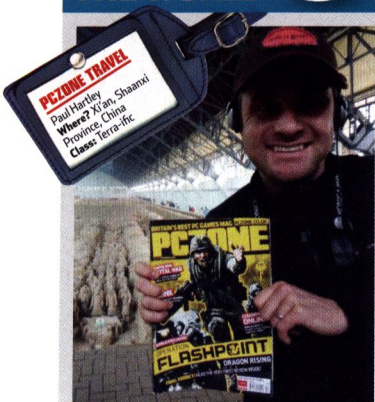
Torchlight: a click 'n' slash RPG and PC exclusive.

➤ I have seen reviews of the game and it looks good. So I closed the magazine to look for the question on the cover of the magazine, but I cannot find the question. Please can you email me the question, so that I'll be able to enter the competition for a chance to win this game?

Also could you add another free method for entering Tiny Compo? Either via email or the website? Thank you in advance and keep up the good work with this magazine.

Mr N. Townsend

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PCZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



"I really, really want Infinity Ward to go bankrupt"

Hang on – you're not complaining about *Modern Warfare 2*? That's a refreshing change.

There's a special limited edition, one-off 'What happened to Tiny Compo?' compo on our blog to make up for someone stealing it from the *BioShock 2* cover. As for a new method of entry, good point, we've added email entries too.

MORE MW2 ANGER

What in Hades' name are Infinity Ward thinking? There has to be some reason why they're making such a stupid, backward and expletive-ridden mess of their PC release of *Modern Warfare 2*!

First this crap with no dedicated servers and now only 9x9 players in multiplayer games? Are they deliberately trying to piss us off? Or are they trying to show console gamers how much they like to blow them?

I really, really want IW to go bankrupt. As much as I did EA when they were stuffing their games with so much DRM that they made them almost unplayable. Well done IW, you've gone from one of the better developers to the shit who cranks out shovelware. Go rot in Hades.

John Murphy

This was by far the angriest email we had. So it was worth printing as I'm many of you feel the same.

A BAD YEAR?

My PCZONE Reader Awards email arrived this morning, so I decided to cast my votes. As I whittled down my

selections, I realised that this year hasn't been great for PC games.

My Best Shooter would have been *Call of Duty: World at War* but then I realised it came out before your December 2008 qualifying date. My RPG of the year would've been *Fallout 3* but again, it came out before December 2008. What to do?

Modern Warfare 2 and *Dragon Age: Origins* aside, looking over the past year there have not been any outstanding titles that stand out. I'm not including the Christmas run up titles which are all mostly multiplatform anyway.

While I don't subscribe to the 'PC gaming is dying' argument, there has been a noticeable slowdown of PC-only titles. All we seem to be good for nowadays are MMOs (which I don't have the time for at the moment) and strategy games (which I dislike as I'm crap at them). RPGs are normally the PC's forte but nothing stands out over the past year, apart from *Torchlight* which has only just been released. I'm even more depressed now than when I started.

Emmet Cleere

PS: Good to see *NeverQuest* back!

Sadly, many developers don't appear to think developing exclusively for PC games is a viable option anymore. They think they won't get the money they spent developing a game, unless they release it on consoles as well.

However, don't forget a lot of games we were expecting this year have slipped to 2010, scared off by the *Modern Warfare 2* juggernaut, such as *Mafia II* and *BioShock 2*.



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR
DECADE-OLD MAILBAG,
ANSWERED TODAY

WHAT'S AN EXCLUSIVE?

I've noticed that many computer games magazines have the word exclusive plastered all over the cover in relation to certain products, and that in many cases this just isn't true.

When a review is 'exclusive', does it mean that you are reviewing unfinished code in order to steal the lead on other magazines? Does this cause problems?

Recently I read that LucasArts were refusing to give a certain other PC games magazine previews and early code after they gave *Jedi Knight* a very average review.

How much longer will it be before more publishers use these tricks in an attempt to subvert editorial independence?

J Chudley, Paignton

As in September 1998 (issue 67), when we put 'exclusive' against anything, we're assured we will be the first magazine on sale with a review or preview. The internet has made it difficult to be 100% confident something won't be leaked or covered in the US. Also other mags may come out while we're still on sale, with the same review. But we strive to be the first wherever possible.

BREAKING RULES

There have been some horrendous, mostly funny, writing rickets in the last two issues. I know David did his back in and you're short-handed but there's no excuse for "...then there's the kobolds...", "...bored of...", and, worst of all, "...should of...". I bet the perpetrator got an A in English. Country's going to the dogs!

Bob

Have you ever heard of conversational journalism? Obviously not. At least we made you laugh though! **PCZ**

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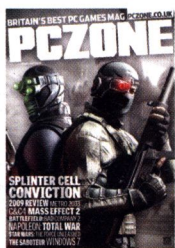
COVER STORY

SPLINTER CONVICTION

STEALTH'S JUST BECOME
MORE SOCIAL....



CELL



FORGET THAT FISHER fellow, *Conviction's* stars are Archer and Kestrel when it comes to co-op. That's Archer like Jeffrey Archer and Kestrel like one of those birds that resembles an angry sparrow. They're the faces (or rather, goggles) of the game's five-hour co-op campaign, a meaty prologue leading up to the events of the main game and taking in locations that can only be described as "new" and "Russian". And as if that wasn't enough, the *Deniable Ops* mode sees you completing two-player challenges across four game types. That's loads to do. We've played the lot of it, so you can find out the things what we thought starting on page 60.

PAGE

60



PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

AUSSIE RULES

YET ANOTHER GAME has been banned in Australia. This time Rebellion's *AvP* has been refused classification because the game contains "close-up depictions of human characters being subjected to various types of violence, including explicit decapitation and dismemberment, as well as locational damage such as stabbing through the chest, mouth, throat, or eyes".

At the time of this announcement (the same week *CrimeCraft* was refused an age rating – see *Stop Press*) SEGA Australia said it would "continue to investigate all options available to us, including the possibility of appeal".

Some developers make changes to games in order to be granted classification, most recently *Left 4 Dead 2*. However, the day after news broke, Rebellion issued a statement saying it would not be one. CEO Jason Kingsley said: "The content of *AvP* is based on some of the most innovative and iconic horror movies, and as such we wanted to create a title that was true to the source material. It is for adults, and it is bloody and frightening, that was our intent. We will not be releasing a sanitized or cut-down version for territories where adults are not considered by their governments to be able to make their own entertainment choices."

That's that then.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood

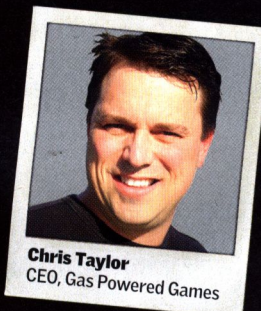
Editor

ali.wood@futurenet.com

TAYLOR MADE

We grill *Chris Taylor* about *Supreme Commander 2*

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games PUBLISHER Square Enix
WEBSITE supremecommander.com ETA March 2010



Chris Taylor
CEO, Gas Powered Games

SQUARE ENIX HAVE taken a firm grasp of *Supreme Commander 2*, Gas Powered Games' megapopulated RTS, and are propelling it madly towards a March release. The colourful strategy opus boasts vast scale and giant stomping robots, but other than that it's shrouded in sexy mystery.

We corner Chris Taylor, CEO at Gas Powered Games, and request that he beat the sexy mystery shroud away with his powerful wings of wisdom.

Q You guys are aiming for a stronger storyline this time around. How does the plot play out during the game?

A One of the goals when we began working with Square Enix was to do more on the storytelling side of it. So the characters are talking, they're

chatting amongst themselves, they're making little comments, not all of it's military. For example Dr Brackman is a brain in a jar, but he's got a son, and there's dynamic between father and son. They're really sophisticated characters, but they're not typical.

There are considerably fewer units on screen in this game compared to the first one. Have you scaled back the number because you've had to accommodate a console version?

That's a lot to do with it. So when I sat down to actually design *Supreme Commander 2* I was like, "You know, I've got a memory footprint situation on the 360, but I'm also in need of

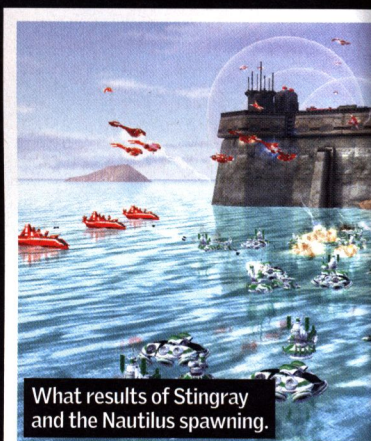
a great innovation in the way our tech tree works, because the three level tech tree is not working for me at all. I don't want to take a tank and then build a better tank and a better tank, and then have the base one and base two level tanks, just to generalise it. That I don't have any use for any more."

So in this game now, those same tanks are the tanks from the beginning that I use in the end game, because they've been upgraded in the field the entire time. So it eliminates this useless

"Multiplayer is very important, but it's just 10% of the audience"



"Oh my God... it's full of tanks."



What results of Stingray and the Nautilus spawning.

STOP PRESS!

STEAMY WINDOWS

Dell have said that all Alienware PCs will be supplied with *Steam* and a free copy of *Portal*. Seems Valve are on target to take over the PC industry.

MEDAL OF HONOR

The new *Medal of Honor* will be set in contemporary Afghanistan. The good news is DICE are going to handle the multiplayer side of things.

BAN THIS FILTH

Australian censors have exorcised their motherland of another game. This time MMO *CrimeCraft* as it has some drugs in it. Won't somebody think of the adults?

27

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Take a look back the past 12 gaming months.



40

METRO 2033

Join Moscow's post-nuclear apocalypse mole people.



60

SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Meet Fisher's new pals. They're the best of enemies.



unit problem, it does dramatically cut my memory footprint, it makes for a better game all the way around.

Sometimes your motivations for doing things aren't always ideal, at least theoretically at first, and then I was pleasantly surprised how it all fell together. It was good, it pushed me.

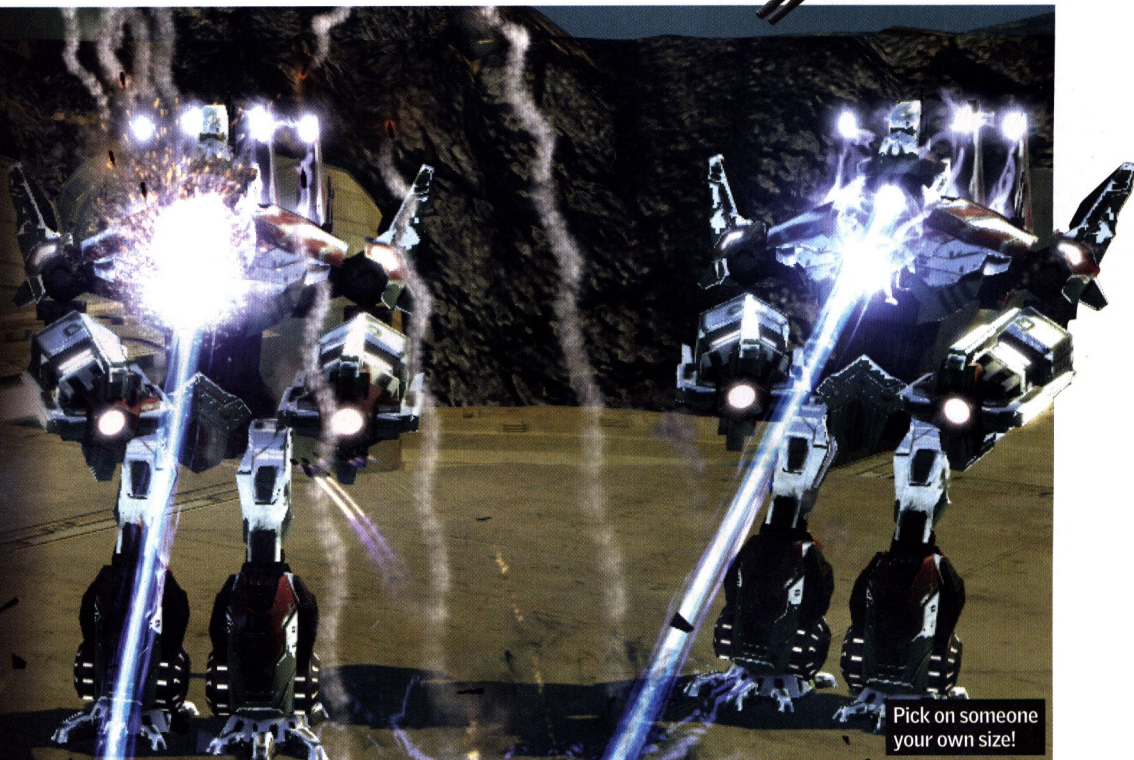
The system requirements for the original *Supreme Commander* were monstrous. Does this parallel development mean this one going to run on a wider range of systems?

Yes, 3-5-year-old hardware on the PC.

Has *Demigod*'s reception changed your stance on online gaming?

We learned that a remarkable number of people on the PC actually like playing alone. When *Warcraft III* sells 5 million units and then you go on Battle.net and at most there's 50,000 people playing, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if most of the people bought it to play online, you'd see maybe a million, but you wouldn't see 50,000.

So we realised that multiplayer is very important, but it's just 10% of the audience. It's a tricky business, because multiplayer in a game sucks up some of your smartest people, but it's a necessary element. **PCZ**



Pick on someone your own size!

STUFF

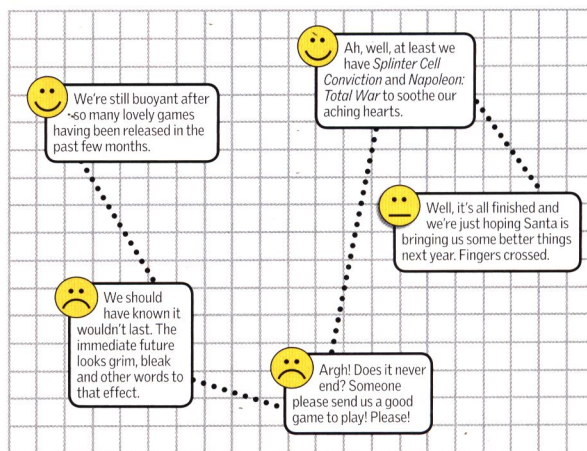
Everyone who's gone a fair distance in *World of Warcraft* reckons themselves to be a bit of an MMO stud, proud of their character and all the quests they've managed to knock off. But prepare to be humbled by Little Gray, who's managed to get each of *WOW*'s 986 current achievements (at the time of writing). That's some pretty hefty hours this Taiwanese player has had to put in to get them all, even if he did cheat a bit and did one of them twice, because he missed out on the BB King one, apparently. So actually he has 985, the loser.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

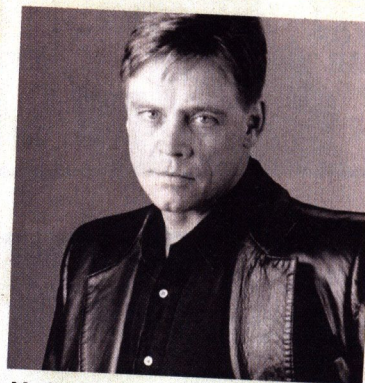
DEADLINE



That does not look ecologically friendly.

THE FORCE IS STRONG

Pavel Barter talks to Mark Hamill, the definitive Jedi knight and Joker, about his career making videogames talk



Mark Hamill
Hard working voicer actor, Jedi knight, and insane supervillain.

MARK HAMILL UNLEASHES a fiendish cackle that simultaneously sounds like skin ripped from flesh and fingernails dragged across corrugated iron. If the bowels of hell have a soundtrack, this is it.

But the actor's descent into madness is only momentary and for anyone familiar with *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, it is all too familiar. In rehearsing his role as Joker, Hamill would laugh to himself in his car: a practice, he jokes, that wasn't so unusual in Los Angeles.

MADMAN GIGGLES

"I have this absolute abandon when it came to Joker's laugh," he says. "It's like a musical instrument. He laughs at really inappropriate times and finds things funny that sane people do not. I wanted to make that a large part of my arsenal in terms of approaching the character. There are so many people that I pay homage to: a little Dwight Schultz [the *A-Team*'s 'Howling Mad' Murdock] here, *Dracula*'s Renfield there."

For anyone who thought his career died with the first *Star Wars* trilogy, Hamill is having the last laugh. After portraying Luke Skywalker, the actor seemed to drop out of sight from the movie world. But he's been under our noses all along in PC games: *Arkham Asylum*, and a few classics like *Wing Commander III* and Tim Schafer's *Full Throttle*. He was a mentor in *Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix*, a narrator in *Call of Duty 2*, and played the hairy hero in *X-Men: Wolverine's Revenge*.

While established actors usually dabble in games for contractual movie tie-ins, Hamill has embraced the genre wholeheartedly. *Star Wars* launched the career of Harrison Ford, but it sent Hamill (and his co-star Carrie Fisher) free-falling toward typecast hell. As his father was a captain in the US Navy,

though, he spent much of his childhood on the move. After Luke was left with the Ewoks in *Return of the Jedi*, he did what he'd always done: move on.

It was this need to break convention that led him, in 1993, to a new medium: the videogame talkie. In *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*, he was one of the first established actors to voice a game character. Some saw it as a step back, but he could hardly have cared less. "I'm sure there's a range of opinions, from 'You're slumming it', or 'Can't you get more legitimate work?' But that snobbishness comes with the business."

By the time of PC gaming's full motion video (FMV) craze in the mid-

star by playing Joker in *Batman: The Animated Series* – he went on to play characters in games like *Starsiege*, relishing the challenges of interactive entertainment. In films, actors rarely explore every nuance of a character. In games, characters change depending on the player's decisions. Some games, such as *Full Throttle*, even gave him a chance to play numerous roles.

This was the only time Hamill acted on a LucasArts title. Considering the amount of *Star Wars* games released, has he intentionally resisted portraying Skywalker in a game?

"When I played Luke from 1977 to 1983, games were in their infancy," he

icon, albeit one that'd have the *Star Wars* hero quivering in his toga.

Throughout the '90s, he played Joker in *Batman: The Animated Series*, reviving the role in various spin-offs, and for the 2001 game *Batman: Vengeance*.

TERRIBLE GENIUS

"I played Joker from 1992 to 2004 in all the animated versions, including the feature films," he says. "I stopped in 2004 and didn't expect to return to him, so when they asked me to come back I was curious." The return of the *Animated Series*' Kevin Conroy as Batman and Arleen Sorkin as Harley Quinn, alongside the writing talents of *Lost*'s Paul Dini to *Arkham Asylum* convinced him to sign up.

"I thought this will be one last chance to play Joker. And it was so much fun to play a character who is clearly insane." So what does Hamill think drives Batman's foe?

"I'm an old school comic book fan and I thought Heath Ledger was brilliant in *The Dark Knight*: a harrowing interpretation with a complete lack of joy. But I think Joker has a huge ego, and he's almost angry that Batman is obstructing his ascent. He believes he deserves acclaim for his genius."

In Hollywood, Hamill must meet people like that all the time. "Absolutely, but all these things are exaggerations of real life."

Having acted in film, TV, theatre and animation, Hamill is not giving up on games. His next project, *Black Pearl*, is based on a run of comics he wrote in the '90s, and there's an animated movie in the works. The actor could have retired to bask in *Star Wars* glory years ago, but his love of the job keeps him going.

He laughs again, only this time not in the manner of a terrifying lunatic. "The minute I get jaded is the minute I don't get out of my pyjamas." **PCZ**

"I thought this will be one last chance to play Joker. And it was so much fun to play a character who is clearly insane"

'90s actors were eating their words. The titles may have been camper than a row of tents, but they were not short on talent, as Hamill discovered when he played Colonel Christopher Blair in three *Wing Commander* games.

MAN OF MANY VOICES

"There were great actors in that: Malcolm McDowell [*A Clockwork Orange*], John Rhys-Davies [*Lord of the Rings*], and John Spencer [*The West Wing*]. Malcolm is one of the most hysterically funny actors I've ever worked with. He's just brutal in his humour and merciless in terms of torturing you on camera. He would be making smoochy faces and I'd tell him, 'You know, I never look you in the eyes, I'm looking you in the chin, you S.O.B.'"

As he developed a parallel career in animation voiceover – becoming a cult

says. "I talked about turning a page and starting a new chapter. Those movies had a beginning, middle and end, and everyone sort of moved on."

"I don't really know how to answer that, because I've never been asked to do it. That's fine, though. If you're playing Luke the way he was in the films – from his late teens to mid-'20s – I've outgrown the role. In the story, Luke is so boy-next-door farm boy, it's like Dorothy in *Oz*. All the other characters that surround him are fantastic."

He pauses for thought. "I'm not sure when George's animated series *Clone Wars* is set, but I think it's before Luke was born. Maybe when he was an infant." Perhaps, then, he could provide infant sounds? "Yeah, whimpering myself to sleep at night."

With Luke put to rest, Hamill became known for portraying another

LUKE WHO'S TALKING

Mark Hamill on his gaming glories: past, present, and future...



1. CALL OF DUTY 2 (2005)

"I was mostly in the studio by myself, doing whatever was required. But it's all artifice really – like looping dialogue. A huge percentage of the *Star Wars* movies are looped, meaning ADR – additional dialogue recording. It's not the original voice track: it's us in studios, replacing our voices. If there's anything that needs a specific noise it's looped. The sound people will tell you – they won Oscars on all three films."

2. X-MEN: WOLVERINE'S REVENGE (2002)

"The thing about voiceover that is so appealing to me is it's liberating not to be seen. The anonymity is part of the magic. I feel like a magician's assistant in the sense that if you play your part right, it comes out really well. In voiceover you can play a much broader range of characters, because they're not concerned with how you look, just how you sound."

3. BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM (2009)

"Joker is endearing because he's so committed to what he considers his own genius. There's a real symbiotic relationship with Batman. I don't know if there are two fictional characters more perfectly suited to one another. Maybe Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty. He takes such glee in what he does. It's absurd on its face – you can't bring too much real-life logic to it, but within the comic book world, he towers above so many other run-of-the-mill villains."

4. FULL THROTTLE (1995)

"I remember playing a full, three-piece suited character, almost someone out of a Tennessee Williams play. I came at that game with a repertory theatre frame of mind, where you play a butler one night, the leading man the next, then a sidekick the third night. Maybe the fourth night, you're not even on stage: you're running the booth. A jack of all trades, master of none. I grew up that way."

5. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX (2002)

"I love character parts because they are so far removed from yourself. When I played Amadeus or Joseph Merrick (aka 'The Elephant Man') on Broadway, I look in the mirror and feel Mark has receded and the character is there. I lean on the side of villainy for voiceover because they push the buttons of the audience and illicit emotions that make for a colourful story."

6. BLACK PEARL (TBC)

"The challenge here is to make [the spin-off of Hamill's comic book] as gritty and realistic as real life. If you accidentally kill someone, you'll be pursued by the forces of justice. You get wounded and tired, and so you'll be rewarded for non-confrontation. It's the opposite of a shooter. The game isn't an easy sell, because it's different. It's more of a stealth game. We're trying to attempt an alternate adventure and action game."

7. GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS (1993)

"This is where Mark gets to be Steve Buscemi: a character sidekick to Tim Curry. Curry is a masterful actor. I saw him on stage when he did *Rocky Horror* at the Roxy Theatre on Sunset Boulevard. When I was listening to Tim's tracks, in my imagination I had a perfectly lit set, even though I was in a recording studio. To me that's what is so thrilling about voice-acting for games."

8. WING COMMANDER (1994-1997)

"We had cheat sheets of every kind. If you look at the game, when we're looking down at the game's interface with light on our faces, that's from a teleprompter because of the massive amount of dialogue. One of the greatest things about doing animation or videogames is you don't have to memorise your lines. You get as old as I am, it's hard."

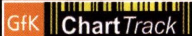
Is there anything you want **PC ZONE** to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Special Report, PC ZONE,
2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by



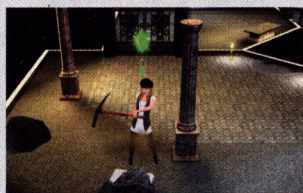
- 1 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 88%
- 2 **NEW MODERN WARFARE 2**
Issue 215 - 94%
- 3 **NEW THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**
Issue 215 - 78%
- 4 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 5 **NEW LEFT 4 DEAD 2**
Issue 215 - 94%
- 6 **NEW DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**
Issue 214 - 93%
- 7 **FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION**
N/A
- 8 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 9 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 10 **BORDERLANDS**
Issue 215 - 88%
- 11 **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 80%
- 12 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 13 **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 78%
- 14 **CSI: DEADLY INTENT**
N/A
- 15 **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 16 **RE NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT**
Issue 214 - 84%
- 17 **OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING**
Issue 213 - 90%
- 18 **NEW COMPANY OF HEROES: ANTHOLOGY**
N/A
- 19 **FIFA MANAGER 10**
Issue 215 - 72%
- 20 **NEW TROPICO 3**
Issue 214 - 84%

**2. MODERN WARFARE 2**

The Best Game EVER!™ is at second place? If it had dedicated server support, this wouldn't have happened!

**5. LEFT 4 DEAD 2**

Valve's zombie shooter falls far behind *FM2010* and *MW2*. A sign people are sick of zombies?

**3. THE SIMS 3:****WORLD ADVENTURES**

So if you weren't shooting up airports, you were grave robbing in Egypt.

**6. DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**

The best RPG of the decade? Maybe. It's definitely the most talkative, with NPCs who never shut up.



If graffiti be the food of love, tag on.

SHAKESPEARE GOES STREET**Macbeth: down with the homies**

WEBSITE www.eckountld.com

DOES ANYONE REMEMBER the game *Mark Ecco's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*? Don't worry if you've forgotten it, because the game was more heinous than a lapse of gaming memory.

If you read our review from way back in issue 167, Steve O'Hagan thought it was a game about "relieving morning wood," but actually it's about spray-painting New York with fly designs. Mark Ecco is some fashion designer who wants to muscle in on other territories.

So, he's back and saying he wants to make a game based on *Macbeth*. Yep, double-take as much as you want, that

reads *Macbeth*: Shakespeare's cursed play that caused the revolutionary actors in *Blackadder III* a huge amount of trouble.

Ecco, it seems, has come up with his own version of *Macbeth*, one which would be a violent action game with a heavy focus on decapitation. It's nice to see he's not messing with the classics and remaining true to Shakespeare's original material.

Is there any room for some spray-painting or some fly boys dissin' your girly? We can only hope so.

Sadly, the effervescent project has been rejected and canned. Alas, poor Ecco! We knew him, not very well.

RISKY CHICK
Porn tempts Warcrafters

WEBSITE snipurl.com/sophos_wow

THE GENERALLY HELD view of your average *World of Warcraft* player is a man who sits in his bedroom all day, crisp packets and pizza boxes piled around his form, and a sordid array of poopsocks nailed to the wall like a sickening rack of gaming trophies.

It seems that's how spammers and professional timewasters see them too. So if you're one of these socially inept reprobates, or just have a taste for the female form, be on alert.

One of the latest attempts to pollute your gaming system with a vast array of malware, and even a video that launches a Trojan capable of stealing *WOW* user

names, accounts and other information, comes in an RAR file with the enticing title "Do you like to find a girlfriend like me?"

If you make the mistake of opening the file, you'll see folders promising to contain photos of various naked female bodily parts – many of the intimate kind – usually concealed beneath petticoats, knickers and other such garments. You'll also spend a week cleaning your PC. You've been warned.



She'll kill your PC.



Infinity Ward has a novel way of dealing with cheaters.

MC BAN HAMMER

Infinity Ward slap down cheats

WEBSITE infinityward.com

MUCH AS EVERYONE who wasn't an Infinity Ward or Activision employee must have known the presence of cheats in *Modern Warfare 2* was as inevitable as Sir Alex Ferguson complaining about the referee after a defeat.

Sure as anything, the removal of dedicated server support, a feature touted as being part of the war on cheats, failed spectacularly to make a blind bit of difference. Some even argued it made it easier.

Infinity Ward and Valve have responded by wielding the ban hammer on approximately 2,500 "confirmed cheaters", squashing their illegal hopes and dreams like so many bugs.

Of course, the question is whether actual cheats were caught, or was it just people who'd used third-party software to re-enable all the features IW blocked out of the PC version for little reason. How many genuine customers who wanted to change the field of view option in the game have been splattered by the ban hammer? If you're one of these people, do write in and tell us.

Needless to say, the reaction from certain sceptical internet users has been less than supportive of Infinity Ward's pre- and post-release stance on all of this, with many cries of "We told you so!" echoing through the distant digital halls.

BEAUTY RECONSTRUCTED

Champ Man dev heads to China

WEBSITE www.square-enix.com/eu/en

NEWS REACHES US at Zone Towers that Beautiful Game Studios, makers of *Championship Manager*, are being "restructured" by its new owner, Square Enix. It's being said that 80% of the company's current positions will be wiped out or relocated to China.

This doesn't mean that the *CM* series will finally be put down, though, as there will still be some people working on it. It's a shame, not just for those working at BGS, but also because they finally managed to make a *CM* game that was genuinely competitive with the *Football Manager* series.

What effect this will have on the next game, and on the monthly updates that were planned, isn't known.

In other Eidos/Square news, there were wild rumours flying about the place that *Deus Ex 3* would be a PC

exclusive, which would have made a change in the current climate.

However, puzzled community managers and employees were quick to register their bafflement with said rumours and have dismissed them summarily.

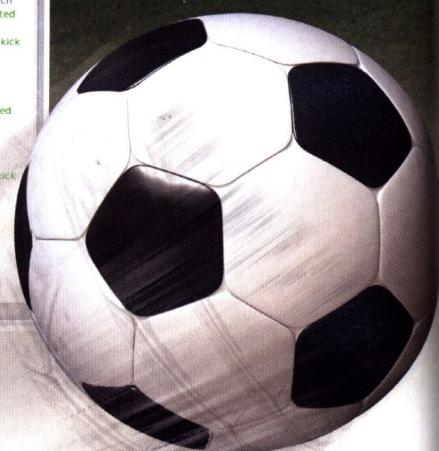
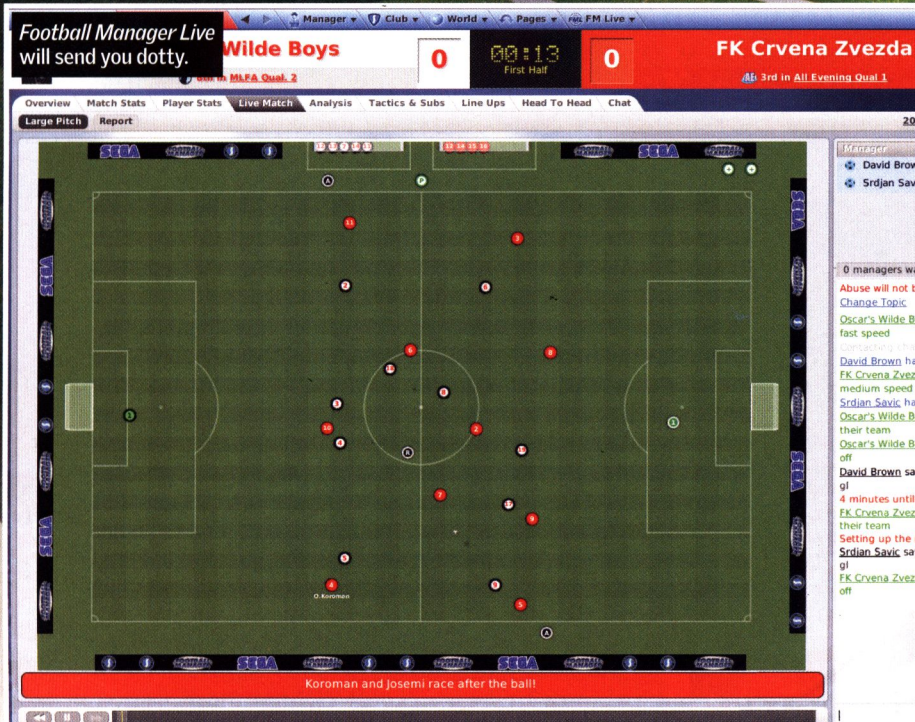
At the time of writing, though, there hadn't been any mention of a multi-platform release, so we'll just have to keep our ears to the ground in case we hear anything more.



That's a mini-minigun.



He smokes:
how rebellious!



FOOTBALL MANAGER DEAD?

Too many servers and not enough players

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE footballmanagerlive.com

SO THE TITLE'S a bit dramatic. No, *Football Manager Live* (issue 205, 85%) isn't dying, but it's not in the rudest of health, shall we say. The problem, at the moment, is that while server numbers are high, player numbers are relatively low, meaning that the number of competitors on each of the 34 servers (or Game Worlds) have been steadily dropping until most of them are only a third full.

There are a number of reasons behind this that we can deduce. First the game, as it stands, is even more uncompromising for new players than

initially anticipated. For those who have attempted to get involved, so few people are ever online at any one time that playing against actual humans involves significant effort and/or luck.

Even when you do get to play anyone, they're almost certainly going to be a hell of a lot better than you at the game and will destroy your 11-man collection of misfits. You won't be able to find any real quality players, because they're all hoovered up by the handful of managers who take the whole thing really seriously.

Next, there's the fact they've all got the tactical element of the game down

to a tee. Your hopeless generic attempts will be ripped to shreds and you won't stand a chance.

At the moment, it seems that about 1-in-50 new players actually makes anything of their team, which is a shocking indictment of how tough and unforgiving the game is for new players.

To try to fix these problems Sports Interactive have taken the controversial view of deciding to reset all the servers and combine the 34 into a far more manageable (and, you would think, more populated) eight.

This means all the skills acquired, and all the stadium improvements made, since the game's launch will be

"Football Manager Live isn't dying, but it's not in the rudest of health"

for nothing. Considering that some people will have been paying a subscription fee for a year to build up their team and you can see why this move might be unpopular.

The changes won't take place until March 2010 and Sports Interactive are trying to soften the blow by giving everyone two months free play. Of course, March is more than two months away, so players will still be paying for a subscription to a Game World that is, for all intents and purposes, a dead man walking.

Note also that some people will have recently renewed their subs, only to find all subsequent efforts will be a waste of time beyond the very near future.

There is some good news, though, which could be enough to rejuvenate a sagging, flaccid community of bored players who can't even begin to compete with the people who log in the

most and who've developed the best tactics: there'll be Elite Gameworlds that will be invite only. Perhaps this will mean that the truly best players will be confined to their own inner circle, leaving normal people to play out their games in peace.

We're always willing to remain optimistic, so if this move doesn't just drive away all the people that are keeping the game alive, perhaps it'll make this new style of MMO the success we were hoping it would be when it launched. Fingers crossed. **PCZ**



**JEFFREY STEEFEL**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, TURBINE

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SIEGE OF MIRKWOOD

Lording it up with *Steve Hill* and a bunch of pointy eared folk

DEVELOPER Turbine **PUBLISHER** Codemasters Online **WEBSITE** lotro-europe.com **ETA** Out now

THE SECOND EXPANSION of *The Lord Of The Rings Online* is upon us, offering five more levels of progress for those who've made it to the cap of 60, as well as all-new quick-play skirmishes. Steve Hill had a chat with Turbine about what we can expect to find in Mirkwood.

Q Where is Mirkwood and why is there a siege?

A Mirkwood is again in the misty mountains. Basically the story is that Lothlorien and Southern Mirkwood are locked in battle in the early part of the War of the Ring. Things are getting nasty, and this is actually something that has happened in the past.

Mirkwood is a place that the elves of old controlled. This is where the elves and men had a great relationship. Dol Guldur is at the easternmost edge of Southern Mirkwood, and Sauron has placed three Nazgûls there.

How true is this to the fiction?

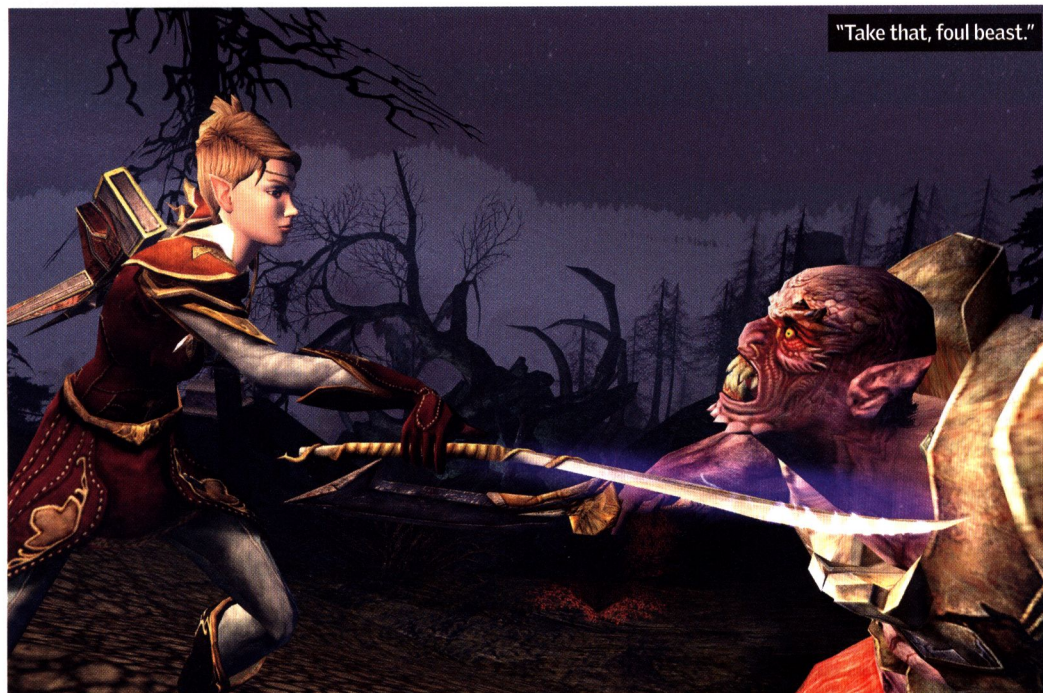
It's very true. This did not occur in the same way in the Third Age, but in earlier parts in history this kind of battle absolutely did happen, so this is all very true to the lore in the books.

Do you have to get permission from the Tolkien estate? Can you play loose with the story?

Play loose, probably not. But we work directly with what is now called Middle-earth Enterprises. They have the licence from the estate, so we deal with them.



A classic spider vs hobbit scuffle.



"Take that, foul beast."

As long as we're true to the lore, the world and the spirit of Tolkien they give us a fair amount of flexibility. So long as we're not trying to make up things that don't make any sense in the lore.

LOTRO has captured Tolkien's lore uniquely: it's not like the films.

That's the idea. It's a completely different medium. The films are designed – and they do it brilliantly – to tell the story of the Ring Bearer in a film environment, and we're trying to give players an insight into all of Middle-earth, not only present time but also in the past.

The skirmish system is the biggest gameplay change. How is it going to work?

If you take our story instances there are generally three persons or six persons involved each time, so we took that to the next level.

"I think Tolkien would have thought this was really, really cool"

Skirmishes are a way to build these instances with a lot of flexibility, a lot of randomisation, a lot of specialisation. So I can go into a skirmish with up to 12 players, and find there's a story and there are characters in it. I can start a skirmish any time I want to, so I don't have to go to a place in the landscape, I can just go right in the HUD and configure it in about one minute, invite my friends and we're all pulled directly to it without having to do anything else. Each encounter is intended to be a 30-45 minute experience.

There's also a three-part 12-man raid where you're basically working your way up Dol Guldur Tower and when you get to the top you're facing off with one of Sauron's Nazgûl – a Ring Wraith.



Dentists yet to be invented.

What do you think JRR Tolkien would have made of all of this if he were alive?

I think Tolkien would have thought this was really, really cool, but I never met the man. I would think because of the richness of the world he created, the idea that it could actually be visualised in a fashion, I'm sure he would have told us all the things we screwed up. But I think it would blow his mind. **PCZ**

Incoming

All dates are correct at time of press!

YOU CAN TELL the end of the year is in sight. Not only are videogames companies making fewer announcements (read: doing less work), but they don't even seem to be looking that far into 2010 yet; they're not talking about it much at least. Chasing around for some sort of confirmation on release dates in 2010 has left us feeling pretty

pissed off as no one's talking. We've never understood why many publishers only have discussions about the year ahead, in the 'year ahead' in question, developers obviously know what their deadlines are, so surely they do to. They should be officially telling us exactly what the year holds for us. We're not exactly asking for the moon on a stick now, are we?

DARK VOID

Brad Pitt's production company has acquired the rights for the movie based on Capcom's upcoming Dark Void. It's being developed as a 'sci-fi action franchise' and could star Mr Pitt himself. Plan B will be working with Reliance BIG Entertainment, whose chairman Amit Khanna said: "We are delighted that our creative partnership with Plan B has led to this agreement to develop the *Dark Void* motion picture, based on *Dark Void* along with Capcom." Plan B has produced films such as *The*

Departed and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. *Dark Void* is out on 15 January, though there's no news on when the *Dark Void* movie will materialise.



ALIENS VS PREDATOR

Rejoice! Rebellion's CEO Jason Kingsley has confirmed AvP will support dedicated servers. "Despite rumours, Rebellion has always been planning to support dedicated servers for *Aliens vs Predator* PC and we can now officially confirm that this is the case."

This is a bit of a relief as senior producer, David Brickley had previously been vague about plans: "You know what the internet's like. We're obviously used to getting things for free over the years. I guess on our side the thing

we're focusing on is whatever your set-up at home, you get the best possible experience from it. We're just trying to use our time and resources wisely."



AHEAD OF THE GAME TIMELINE

Take heed readers - this chart shows how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.

ANTICIPATION LEVEL

BIG BANG
NUCLEAR WAR
VOLCANO
DYNAMITE
HAND GUN
BURP

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

15 JAN 2010
DARK VOID

9 FEB 2010
BIOSHOCK 2

FEBRUARY
NAPOLEON:
TOTAL WAR

FEBRUARY
ALIENS VS
PREDATOR

23 FEB 2010
SPLINTER CELL
CONVICTION

MARCH 2
BATTLEFIELD

MARCH 2010
ALL POINTS BULLET

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| ALL POINTS BULLETIN | EA | MARCH |
| COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT | EA | MARCH |

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| DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING | THQ | MARCH |
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| R.U.S.E. | UBISOFT | MARCH |
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| DARK STAR ONE | KALYPSO | APRIL |
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| PLANET 51 | SEGA | APRIL |
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| POLE POSITION 2010 | KALYPSO | APRIL |
|--------------------|---------|-------|

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| ALPHA PROTOCOL | SEGA | SPRING 2010 |
|----------------|------|-------------|

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| BLUR | ACTIVISION | SPRING 2010 |
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| BRINK | BETHESDA | SPRING 2010 |
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| DC UNIVERSE ONLINE | SOE | SPRING 2010 |
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| DOGFIGHTER | KALYPSO | SPRING 2010 |
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| FINAL FANTASY XIV | SQUARE ENIX | SPRING 2010 |
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| THE FIRST TEMPLAR | KALYPSO | SPRING 2010 |
|-------------------|---------|-------------|

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| I AM ALIVE | UBISOFT | SPRING 2010 |
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| JUMP GATE EVOLUTION | CODEMASTERS | SPRING 2010 |
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| KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS | SQUARE ENIX | SPRING 2010 |
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| MAFIA II | 2K GAMES | SPRING 2010 |
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| MEDAL OF HONOR | EA | SPRING 2010 |
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| SILENT HUNTER 5 | UBISOFT | SPRING 2010 |
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| SINGULARITY | ACTIVISION | SPRING 2010 |
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| SPLIT/SECOND | DISNEY | SPRING 2010 |
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| STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY | BLIZZARD | SPRING 2010 |
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| TWO WORLDS II | SOUTHPEAK | SPRING 2010 |
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| WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm | BLIZZARD | SPRING 2010 |
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| VICTORIA 2 | PARADOX | 18 JUNE |
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| THE SECRET WORLD | FUNCOM | SUMMER 2010 |
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| THE AGENCY | SOE | 2010 |
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| ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES | SEGA | 2010 |
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| CIVILIZATION 5 | 2K GAMES | 2010 |
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| CRYSIS 2 | EA | 2010 |
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| DEUS EX 3 | SQUARE ENIX | 2010 |
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| DUNGEONS | KALYPSO | 2010 |
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C&C4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT

While announcing the final chapter in the Tiberium (or Tiberian, depending on how Westwood are feeling) story will be out on the 19 March. EA also said



that those who pre-order early will also be guaranteed a spot on the beta programme, and be able to reserve a copy of the soundtrack and a bonus

in-game mission. But recent reports say the core C&C team will be let go when *Twilight* is done, and Jon Van Cenghem has joined EA to transform C&C with a new digital model that'll "reignite the fan base," according to Nick Earl, EA Games Label senior VP. We're not sure what this means but hope the C&C team are looked after.

STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

While the game's not even in beta yet, Blizzard have let the *StarCraft II* community know about a stack of new content on the game's official website



starcraft2.com. On there are articles on single-player storytelling and multiplayer map design for the RTS trilogy. There's also a short story, new character bios, new screens and art and videos.

This announcement piggybacked on the news that *Diablo III* will be released in 'the next few years', along with *StarCraft II* expansion packs, and Blizzard's next MMO, which they're being ultra-tight-lipped about. Ho hum. Guess we'll have to sit tight for a bit longer.

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| FI 2010 | CODEMASTERS | 2010 |
| FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS | BETHESDA | 2010 |
| HOMEFRONT | THQ | 2010 |
| MAX PAYNE 3 | ROCKSTAR | 2010 |
| METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING | KONAMI | 2010 |
| PATRICIAN IV | KALYPSO | 2010 |
| PRISON BREAK | DEEP SILVER | 2010 |
| RAGE | EA | 2010 |
| SETTLERS VII | UBISOFT | 2010 |
| STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT | BITCOMPOSER | 2010 |
| STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC | EA/LUCASARTS | 2010 |
| DIABLO III | BLIZZARD | 2011 |

APRIL

AND BEYOND...

SPRING 2010
ALPHA PROTOCOL

SPRING 2010
MASS EFFECT 2

SPRING 2010
WOW: CATAclysm

TBC 2010
CRYSIS 2

TBC 2010
DEUS EX 3

TBC 2010
STARCRAFT II

TBC 2010
THE OLD REPUBLIC

TBC 2010
THE AGENCY

SPRING 2010
MAFIA II

JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

SO NOW I'M THE

ABSOLUT PRICK



Every job has its perks. Being a top-ranking bassoonist gets you into the hottest jazz clubs. Being an international business mogul gives you exclusive entry into the Pampering Lounge at airports, where you're covered in a luxurious skin butter and molecule-sized Chihuahuas are encouraged to lick you clean.

Of course, every job also has its downsides: bassoonists are doomed to make only a desolate honking sounds whenever they open their mouths, and it's sometimes difficult for business moguls to decide how many houses to buy. Not to mention their blood feud with the tycoons, who pelt them with baskets of Fabergé eggs from Heathrow's infinitely more exclusive Tycooneria.

RUSSIAN TEMPTERS

I'm going to say something that sounds wise, but like most wise sayings, is in fact utterly unworthy and pompous: the measure of a man is the stoic goodwill with which he suffers the imperfections in his life – knowing, after all, that your choices contributed heavily to bringing you here – and the continuing gratitude with which you accept the good times. Basically, I just said "don't whinge and don't take shit for granted", but I said it like a prick. And talking of behaving like an unforgivable prick, let's do a small case study: me and writing about games.

There are many down sides about writing about games. It's certainly a poorly paid job, but there's not enough money in the world for everyone to be rich, so you buy Kirov instead of Absolut and get on with it. And when your passion is as low maintenance as an internet connection and knowing how to get an emulator working, you hardly need a lottery win to keep you in Findus Crispy Pancakes.

The baffling perk is the trips. Activision flew the world's media to Los Angeles, just to play a 20-minute loop of *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer. Even with less insanely blockbusting titles – say, *Metro 2033* – over 100 writers were flown to Moscow to spend a day in an underground bunker once used by Stalin. Why, you might ask? I'd be forced to shrug in response.

Don't get me wrong, these events aren't holidays: they're well-run machines, in which every hour is taken by organised work or organised fun. But the key figure, and the common theme, is the PR. The PR is a mythical creature, around whom all drink and food becomes magically free. If this didn't happen, writers would wander off, start climbing trees, and popping their heads out of dustbins in the background. The idea that something free might happen soon keeps you incredibly focused.



"I was important enough to this person for him to ply me with cheese and pickle"

The first time a PR bought me a sandwich at an airport, it was like falling in love. I – Jon Blyth – was important enough to this person for him to ply me with cheese and pickle. Like any loving relationship, I playfully tested the boundaries. "Can I have a pony?" I laughed, before letting my face drop slack to communicate that I was deadly serious.

On the *Metro 2033* trip, however, I came to realise how much I've changed. Noticing that the PR was occupied with more important people – editors, brand managers, and the mainstream press – I spent long, undignified minutes establishing myself in his peripheral vision. "We're thinking about getting a burger", said the other writers, with whom I'd been, up to this point, friendly.

I DEMAND FOOD

"Fuck that," I snarled. "I think I heard them talk about getting a meal. We're going to sit on the next table, we're eating massive pizzas, and if we don't get everything paid for, we'll say the game's shit."

I'd crossed a line. That pizza was my million quid banker's bonus: unacceptable, revolting, but I'd come to believe I deserved it. Eventually, it worked: my reward was a Bavarian sausage pizza. The cost was simply the respect of my peers, and the exchange rate on respect is crap. **PCZ**


HONESTY BY AMORALITY

This column ties in with the constant allegations of corruption that have flown around since someone noticed that a 98% review score could improve game sales. Accusers will say, "how can you give your honest opinion about a game, when a company has shown you an underground bunker, and bought you a Bavarian sausage pizza?" What these people underestimate is the mindless way in which we writers consume: our unthinking, thankless attitude, and our bewildering sense of entitlement. To be corrupt, you need a moral code to break: we are mere locusts.

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW



PCZONE READER AWARDS 2009

ALIENWARE

WIN!

Did you vote?

Then you've got
a chance to win this
gaming notebook
worth £1,199!

THE 2009 READER AWARDS

VOTING IS NOW CLOSED!

Did you vote for the *PC ZONE* Reader Awards 2009? Then we bet you're dying to find out who's won. Well, you'll just have to wait a little bit longer as voting's now closed and we're currently wading through all the entries and getting them ready for revealing in issue 217, on sale 20 January.

Plus, we'll be revealing which lucky reader will be randomly selected to win an Alienware M15x gaming laptop, worth £1,199! Alienware say is the most powerful notebook they've ever made! Check out the back of the mag for more on this portable PC.

ALIENWARE  | ALL POWERFUL

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THE
HIGHS AND
LOWS OF
2009

2009

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

WELCOME TO THE *PC ZONE* round-up of 2009. And what a year it's been. Personally, I celebrated a decade working in video games, (making me feel rather old). The end of 2009 also heralds the end of a decade, the Noughties, and the relief that people will stop using that stupid word.

Games-wise I've been a little disappointed. Winter releases slipping into 2010 are annoying, (I guess it makes sense not to go head-to-head with the unstoppable behemoth that was *Modern Warfare 2*), but PC versions of games coming out months after their console counterparts is so frustrating. Read on for our round-up of 2009; can you guess what our highest scoring game was?

Ali Wood

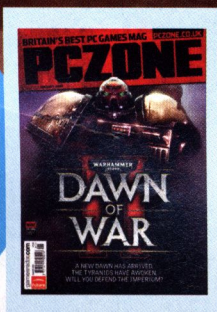
Ali Wood, Editor



Remember when this happened? In January? Wow.

JAN

COVER STAR: *Warhammer 40k: Dawn of War II*
DEVELOPER: Relic
PUBLISHER: THQ



BEST REVIEW *LEFT 4 DEAD* SCORE 93% - BEG 4 MORE

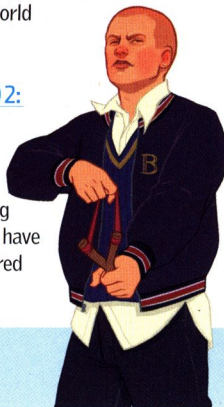
We said: "*Left 4 Dead* is a monumental pillar in multiplayer gaming; playing it without yelping in delight is like eating a doughnut and not licking your lips."

CLOSE SECOND *FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009* SCORE 90% - 3D IS THE NEW 2D

We said: "Even without the 3D engine, *Football Manager 2009* is still fully deserving of its Classic rating, providing a staggeringly comprehensive simulation of the complex world of management."

WORST REVIEW *SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL* SCORE 65% - BORED GUARDIAN

We said: "Graphically pleasing as it is, the gameplay doesn't have that special something required to entice the outsider."



Highlight In the absence of an editor Steve took control. His face appeared everywhere in the magazine.

Low point Not having an editor.

Highlight All the old faces help out.



OUR THOUGHTS

Keith Pullin

Veteran life-saver



What's your highlight of 2009?

It's not been a vintage year, but I'd say weaning myself off *World of Warcraft* goes down as a personal triumph.

What's your game of the year?

Modern Warfare 2. Purely for the drama.

Who is your hero of the year?

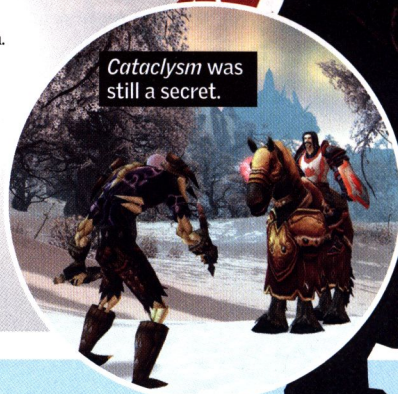
Zangief. Still the daddy after all this time.

Who is your villain of the year?

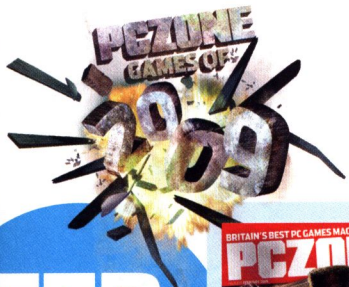
Timothy Langdell - trademark troll. Show us a new game Tim...

What's your New Year's resolution?

Finish the numerous game designs I'm working on.

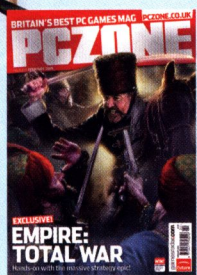


But *Left 4 Dead* was rocking the Casbah.



FEB

COVER STAR: *Empire: Total War*
DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER: SEGA



BEST REVIEW GRAND THEFT AUTO IV SCORE 91% – THE DEFINITIVE RELEASE

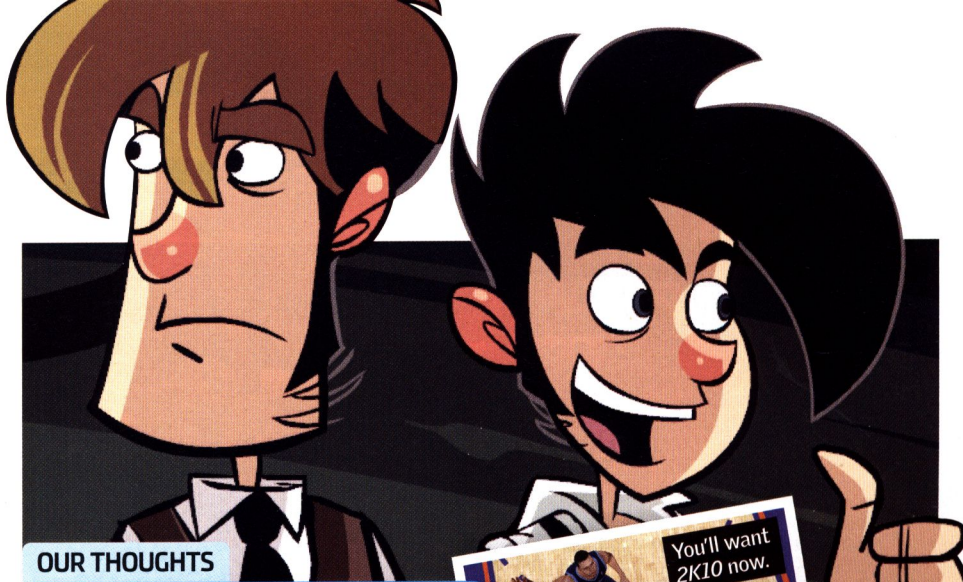
We said: "The PC version brings enough additions and improvements to the fundamental *GTA4* experience to make it an essential purchase."

CLOSE SECOND NBA 2K9 SCORE 87% – LIKE THE REAL THING

We said: "PC fans of the sport should thank their lucky stars 2K Sports have decided to finally bring the game over from consoles."

WORST REVIEW LEGENDARY SCORE 50% – MONSTROUS

We said: "There's no sign that any real love or attention has been put in and, therefore, players will feel very little beyond apathy."



OUR THOUGHTS

Ali Wood

Editor

What's your highlight of 2009?
Buying my first house.

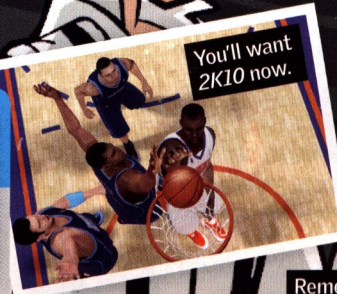


What's your game of the year?
The Sims 3.

Who is your hero of the year?
Miranda Hart, Emma Fryer and Tina Fey for some much needed laughs.

Who is your villain of the year?
I couldn't possibly say!

What's your New Year's resolution?
To chill out.



You'll want 2K10 now.

Remember this? We don't.



Highlight Ali joins as editor! Steve cries in relief.

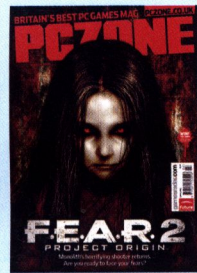
Low point She doesn't have a stripy jumper.

Highlight 2009 will be packed with awesome games.



MAR

COVER STAR: *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin*
DEVELOPER: Monolith
PUBLISHER: Warner



Highlight *World of Warcraft* gets blamed for kids dropping out of university.

Low point Readers mistake our cool *F.E.A.R. 2* cover for being wet.

Highlight We figure out 35 ways to make PC gaming much, much better.

BEST REVIEW STRONG BAD EPISODE 5 SCORE 82% – CONTINUE? YES PLEASE

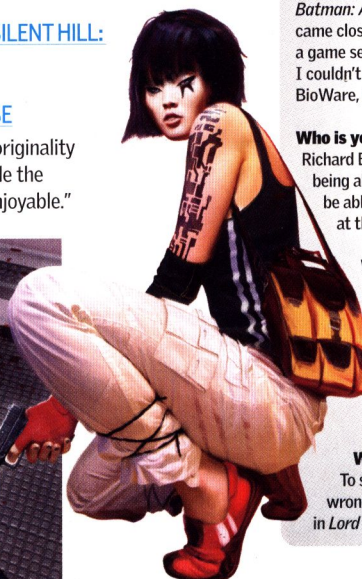
We said: "Some of the most polished and laugh-out-loud writing that Telltale, or any developer, have made for a game since LucasArts in the '90s."

CLOSE SECOND F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN SCORE 80% – LACKING ORIGINAL F.E.A.R.

We said: "The magic of the original *F.E.A.R.* is buried in here somewhere and occasionally it will rear its bloodied head to say hello."

WORST REVIEW SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING SCORE 60% – SILENT APPLAUSE

We said: "Lacks the originality and tension that made the previous games so enjoyable."



OUR THOUGHTS

Chris Capel

Sometime helper



What's your highlight of 2009?
Finally getting user maps on *Left 4 Dead*. Most are obviously dross, but some like *Heaven Can Wait* beat even Valve's efforts. In your face consoles and your 560 Microsoft point-costing *Crash Course*!

What's your game of the year?
Batman: Arkham Asylum. *Dragon Age: Origins* came close, but when a developer makes a game seemingly for me and me alone I couldn't not put it in this slot. Sorry BioWare, there's always next year!

Who is your hero of the year?
Richard B Riddick, for somehow being able to be a good guy and be able to messily slit throats at the same time.

Who is your villain of the year?
Activision and Infinity Ward, for, between a poorly-excused price hike and all their bugging around with our multiplayer, have made *Modern Warfare 2* very easy to pass on. Dodged a bullet there, Valve.

What's your New Year's resolution?
To slay my enemies and get revenge on all those that wronged me. And get through the bloody *Mines of Moria* in *Lord of the Rings Online* at last.



Fighting a T-rex in *Dragon Age*.

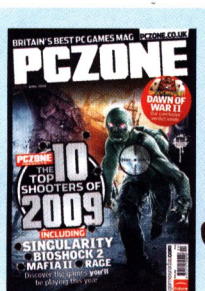


"With my dying breath, I record this cryptic audio log."

E
PRESS
PICK UP INTEL ITEM

APR

COVER STAR: *Singularity*
DEVELOPER: Raven
PUBLISHER: Activision



BEST REVIEW *FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE*
SCORE 85% – MATCH OF THE DAY

We said: "While *FML* may have some faults, the *Football Manager* gameplay we know, love and tear our pubic hair out in rage over is there."

CLOSE SECOND *WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR II*
SCORE 78% – SADLY, NOT A CLASSIC

We said: "Relic have made an admirable stab at redefining the single-player action-RTS experience."

WORST REVIEW *LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST*
SCORE 43% – MINAS BORE-GUL

We said: "Pandemic and EA should be ashamed."



Singularity is lost in time.

OUR THOUGHTS

Wandy

Hardware hardman

What's your highlight of 2009?

Becoming a dad and solid-state drives. I'm now looking forward to solid-state poops.

What's your game of the year?

Still *Team Fortress 2* I'm afraid.

What is your hero of the year?

Windows 7, which is lovely.

What is your villain of the year?

Vista, whose deficiencies have been brought in sharp focus.

What's your New Year's resolution?

To resist buying an Xbox 360 in the January sales.



Highlight *Wrath of the Lich King* selling 2.8 million copies in 24 hours.

Low point Snow on our deadline day, meaning we couldn't skive off and play.

Highlight Snow!

PCZONE PRESENTS THE TOP 10 SHOOTERS OF 2009

BEST REVIEW *EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR*
SCORE 94% – OUTSTANDING

We said: "Empire is accessible and deep, fun and serious, all at the same time."

CLOSE SECOND *BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX*
SCORE 89% – PARADISICAL

We said: "*Paradise* is undeniably fun; it's an outstanding, slick arcade racer from an impassioned and talented development studio."

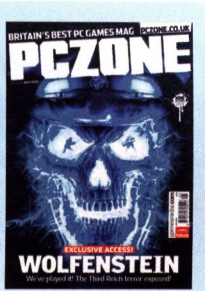
WORST REVIEW *SHELLSHOCK 2: BLOOD TRAILS*
SCORE 32% – SHELLSHOCKING

We said: "This is so bad, it is like beating old ladies to death with hammers."

HIGHEST SCORED GAME IN 2009!

MAY

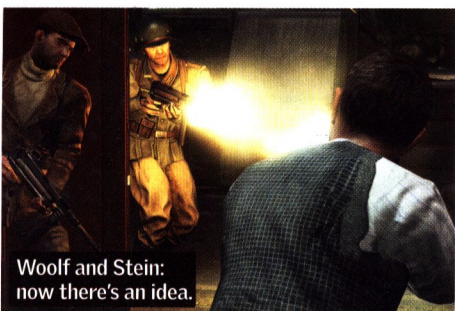
COVER STAR: *Wolfenstein*
DEVELOPER: Raven
PUBLISHER: Activision



Highlight We make our debut on Twitter. (@pczone if you're interested.)

Low point Steve getting snowed in at Heathrow. That'll teach him to leave the office.

Highlight David getting to leave the country for a change.



Woolf and Stein: now there's an idea.



Vrummm, skreee etc.

OUR THOUGHTS

Steve Hogarty

Deputy editor

What's your highlight of 2009?

Eating whole crabs at the Crab House on Pier 39 in San Francisco, having just played *Star Trek Online* at Cryptic's offices. Phasers and seafood go really well together.

What's your game of the year?

Left 4 Dead 2 I suppose, though if I have any real time to sit down and play *Dragon Age* over the holidays, there's a good chance it might change my mind.

Who is your hero of the year?

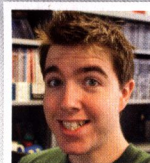
Valve, thanks to their intelligent handling of the ridiculous *L4D2* boycott. Well done those lads.

Who is your villain of the year?

Those guys who killed dedicated servers, whatever their names were. Ian something?

What's your New Year's resolution?

To boycott at least four games. It seems to be the fashion these days, and I've been sitting on the fence for too long.



Steve was delighted to finally meet a bald man.





JUN

COVER STAR: Mafia II
DEVELOPER: 2K Czech
PUBLISHER: 2K Games



BEST REVIEW THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK:
ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA
SCORE 87% - STYLISH AND BRILLIANT

We said: "An excellent game that would have breached the 90% barrier, had it been a little more substantial and erred less on the combat side of things."

CLOSE SECOND RED ALERT 3: UPRISING
SCORE 84% - FLAIR-TASTIC

We said: "For an expansion pack, Red Alert 3: Uprising has a lot of new content. If you're expecting just a few missions and maybe a couple of extra units, prepare your gobs for some true smacking."

WORST REVIEW X-BLADES
SCORE 19% - ARSE BLADES

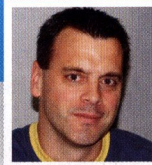
We said: "There's really no reason you'd want to play this, unless you like looking at the pert buttocks of a young girl."



THEIR THOUGHTS

Pete Hines

Bethesda



What's your highlight of 2009?

Any one of a number of 'game of the year' awards for Fallout 3, with the Game Critics and Golden Joystick awards being particularly memorable.

What's your game of the year?

Right now it's Uncharted 2. But I still have to play Dragon Age, Modern Warfare 2, Borderlands... can I get some extra time added to the end of this year, please?

Who is your hero of the year?

Nate Drake, Uncharted and Uncharted 2.

Who is your villain of the year?

The Nazi forces in Company of Heroes. All this time since release, I still play it during lunch whenever I can with one our senior designers.

What's your New Year's resolution?

I'm gonna make a serious dent in my 'movies I've never seen' and 'games I have yet to play' lists.

Mafia II, still our most anticipated game.

Highlight Our amazing Mafia II newspaper-style cover.

Low point Log got burgled and wiped out.

Highlight We smashed up a load of mice. The computer kind - not the cute, furry kind.

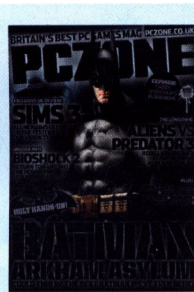


Stompy.



JUL

COVER STAR: Batman:
Arkham Asylum
DEVELOPER: Rocksteady
PUBLISHER: Eidos



BEST REVIEW THE SIMS 3
SCORE 92% - SIM-PLY THE BEST

We said: "I've lost so many hours to The Sims 3 the team were convinced they'd have to surgically remove my mouse from my hand to get me to work."

CLOSE SECOND BRAID
SCORE 90% - TIMELY

We said: "Perhaps the single greatest puzzle platformer you'll ever play, punting the standard for independently developed games into the stratosphere."

WORST REVIEW GREY'S ANATOMY
SCORE 9% - JUST SOD OFF

We said: "Grey's Anatomy is unadulterated shite."

LOWEST SCORED GAME IN 2009!

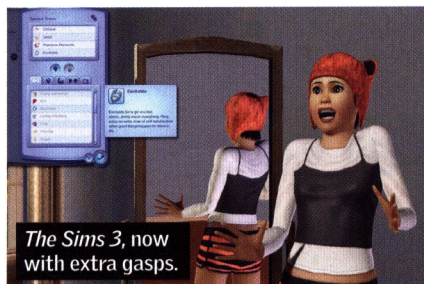
Highlight We got the first look at BioShock 2.

Low point Grey's Anatomy.

Highlight The Plants vs Zombies addiction spreading.



You've just been Batmanned.



The Sims 3, now with extra gasps.

THEIR THOUGHTS

Ed Stern

Senior game designer, Splash Damage



What's your highlight of 2009?

Finally getting to show off Brink in public.

What's your game of the year?

For pure transport of delight, the extraordinary Windosill. Haven't seen anything like it, didn't know what to expect, or do, or do next, was awful at it, still loved it. Windosill isn't made out of bits of other games, or anything other than deep, sweet dreamscape logic. Can't get it out of my head. Elevantygood.

Who is your hero of the year?

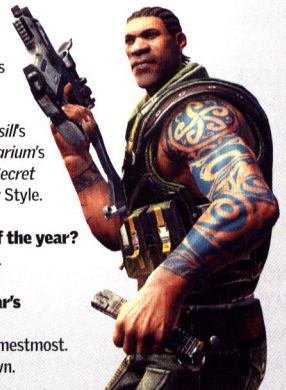
Indie devs: Zeno Clash's Ace Team, Trine's Frozenbyte, Braid's Jonathan Blow, Windosill's Patrick Smith, Machinarium's Amanita, and Spider: Secret Of Bryce Manor's Tiger Style.

Who is your villain of the year?

You know who you are.

What's your New Year's resolution

Make Brink the awesomestmost. And leave the seat down.



AUG

COVER STAR: Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
DEVELOPER: Infinity Ward
PUBLISHER: Activision

JOINT BEST REVIEW ZENO CLASH
SCORE 78% – THWACKO!

We said: "Fraggle Rock, Hieronymus Bosch, Miyazaki – trying to pin a single artistic influence on this game is fruitless. Its style is distinct, and beautifully unsettling."

JOINT BEST REVIEW KING'S BOUNTY:
 THE LEGEND
SCORE 78% – BOUNTIFUL

We said: "There's a huge amount of gameplay to be had here. Worth buying if you like the Heroes of Might & Magic series."

WORST REVIEW DEATH TRACK:
 RESURRECTION
SCORE 27% – DEATH CACK

We said: "The whole thing is an abomination."



OUR THOUGHTS

Steve Hill

A changed man

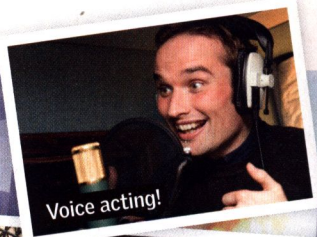
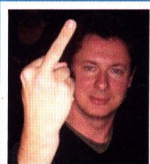
What's your highlight of 2009?
 Spending a night with Courtney Love during E3.

What's your game of the year?
 Modern Warfare 2.

Who is your hero of the year?
 Mark E Smith.

Who is your villain of the year?
 The Chester City chairman.

What's your New Year's resolution?
 To create human life.

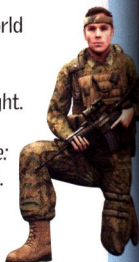


Modern Warfare 2 was as good as promised.

Highlight Our Modern Warfare 2 world exclusive preview.

Low point The summer games drought.

Highlight Hands-on with Dragon Age: Origins. Sexy elf side-boobs abounded.



SEP

COVER STAR: Dragon Age: Origins
DEVELOPER: BioWare
PUBLISHER: EA

BEST REVIEW STREET FIGHTER IV
SCORE 87% – FLYING FISTS OF FANTASTIC FURY

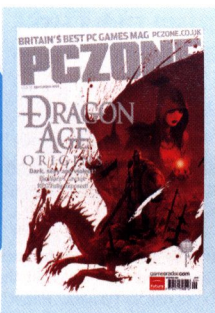
We said: "A brilliant game that can be dabbled with in short bursts or long bouts of human vs human combat."

CLOSE SECOND DANGEROUS HIGH SCHOOL
 GIRLS IN TROUBLE
SCORE 82% – KILLER QUEENS

We said: "You've just got to find out what it involves and why everyone seems to think it's so good. Is it good? Yes, it is."

WORST REVIEW TUNNEL RATS
SCORE 17% – BOLL-OCKS

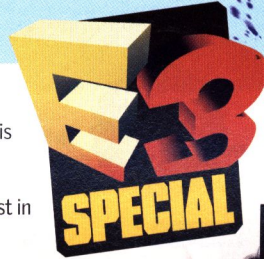
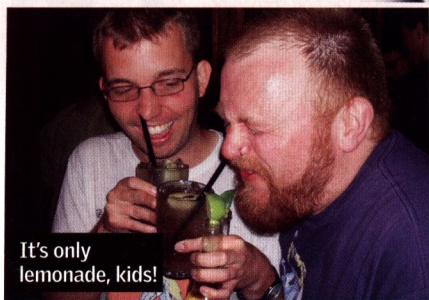
We said: "In short this whole thing is a nauseating mess from start to finish, and even the tunnel bits are atrocious. Still, it's better than any of Uwe Boll's films."



Highlight Log starts his monthly column.

Low point Log gets lost in downtown LA.

Highlight Part one of our E3 special.



OK! Don't get angry! We do love Jedward.

OUR THOUGHTS

Marco Fiori

Bacon saver

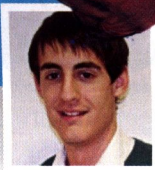
What's your highlight of 2009?
 Being plucked from the work experience pile to stand in for David when he was broken.

What's your game of the year?
 Football Manager 2010. Despite being another yearly update, this one feels as though it's been polished for perfection. (And I hadn't played L4D2, before I wrote this.)

Who is your hero of the year?
 Valve. Despite Steam continually sucking my wallet dry, it's managed to redefine how and what I purchase.

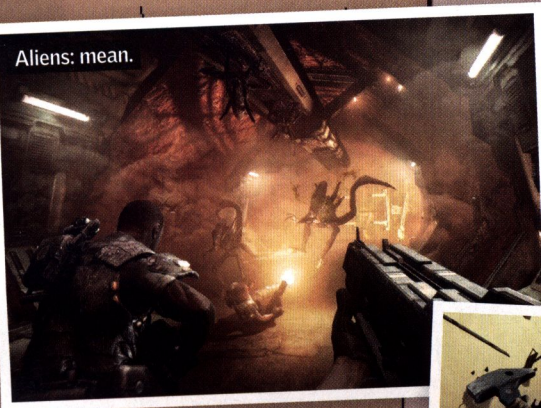
Who is your villain of the year?
 Infinity Ward. Despite starting life as a PC developer, they've managed to go and screw with one of the most critically acclaimed FPS games out there.

What's your New Year's resolution?
 To finally get round to playing half the Steam games I own.



Move one inch and I'll have my Nazi Robot Dinosaurs shoot you where you stand.

Aliens: mean.



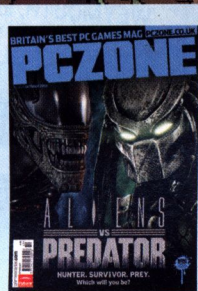
Demolition man.



Inspired by true events.

OCT

COVER STAR: *Aliens Vs Predator*
DEVELOPER: Rebellion
PUBLISHER: SEGA



BEST REVIEW *THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION*
SCORE 91% - SIMPLY INCREDIBLE

We said: "The same *Monkey Island* we all know and love in a new suit, tarted up and given funky water effects on the first screen."

CLOSE SECOND *TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!*
SCORE 90% - GENTLEMANLY GENIUS

We said: "The game is absolutely barking mad, but eventually there reaches a point where crazy becomes unquestionable genius."

WORST REVIEW *THE HARDY BOYS: THE HIDDEN THEFT*
SCORE 22% - AAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!

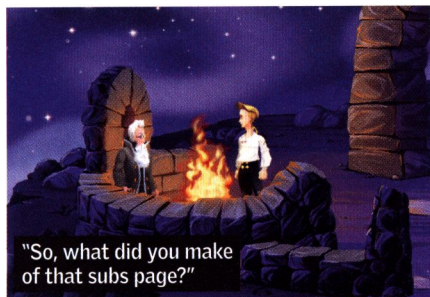
We said: "Bizarre, yet disappointingly dull, display of adventure-gaming madness."



Highlight Work experience helps help.

Low point *DIRT 2* gets delayed because of Microsoft remaking *Vista* as *Windows 7*.

Highlight The controversial subs offer photo.



"So, what did you make of that subs page?"



Stay Puft: a cultural icon of which we were unaware.

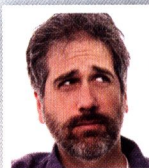
THEIR THOUGHTS

Richard Ham

Creative director, *Splash Damage*

What's your highlight of 2009?

Dropping 20 pounds (so far) on a low carb diet. Oh, you mean in games? I'd have to go with the following sequence of levels from *Modern Warfare 2*: Of Their Own Accord, Contingency, Second Sun, and Whisky Hotel. Those four levels interlock so well and build to such an emotionally satisfying gameplay and storytelling experience, I was literally blown away.



What's your game of the year?

That is so tough. This was a fantastic year. So many big games that were awesome. But I think I'm going to go with the game I spent more time with than any other: the "Warzone" online mode of *Killzone 2*. Brilliantly done.

Who is your hero of the year?

Barack Obama, for openly admitting to the press that he plays (gasp!) videogames! Sure, it's just the family friendly Wii, but we're one step closer to having FPSs played in the White House!

Who is your villain of the year?

ZOMBIES!!!!

What's your New Year's resolution

Another 15 pounds, of course. And this year, I'm gonna make it! Gotta fit into my Scuba suit for the diving trip to Egypt!



Broken Steel, fixed
Fallout 3's ending.

Ashes Cricket 2009,
inarguably a game
about cricket.

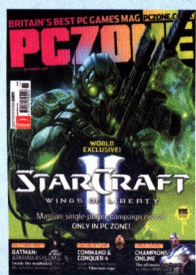
Blood Bowl: for
fans of spinal injury.

TRAIN
SIMULATOR

FROM
WEYMOUTH, ENGLAND
TO
LONDON, ENGLAND

NOV

COVER STAR: *StarCraft II*
DEVELOPER: Blizzard
PUBLISHER: Blizzard



BEST REVIEW *FALLOUT 3: BROKEN STEEL* SCORE 80% - A BETTER END

We said: "Consistently engrossing, explosive and impressive to the eye. It's no *Shivering Isles*, and it still lacks the depth that we want from *Fallout* DLC, but it's very much worth your time and money."

CLOSE SECOND *FALLOUT 3: POINT LOOKOUT* SCORE 76% - SWAMPY

We said: "The main storyline is quirky and very *Fallout*, splicing together the stories of Old World America with the remains of the human race."

WORST REVIEW CLUTCH SCORE 30% - DEAD LAST

We said: "It doesn't take long for the game to get boring as the driving is very basic, with nothing to set it apart from other racing games."

OUR THOUGHTS

Pavel Barter

Special reporter

What's your highlight of 2009?

Although it pains me to say it, *Windows 7*. It's like Robin Hood coming to rescue us from the tyranny of *Vista*. The real highlight, though, was the birth of my baby girl, Edie, who enjoys laughing maniacally at absolutely nothing.



What's your game of the year?

Batman: Arkham Asylum, closely followed by *Point Lookout* for *Fallout 3*.

Who is your hero of the year?

Barack Obama. A bit early to give him the Nobel, though. What if they find bodies under his patio?

Who is your villain of the year?

That Jedward doppelganger off *The X Factor*. Nostradamus predicted his arrival as a sign of an impending apocalypse.

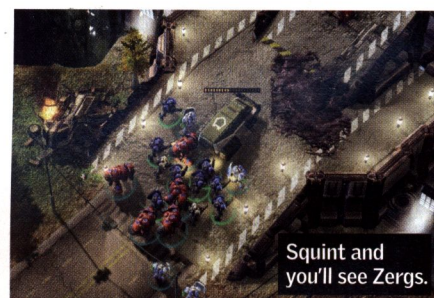
What's your New Year's resolution?

To be extra nice to people and help old ladies across the road (even ones with beards).

Highlight Gamescom sets the world alight with, um, games.

Low point Ali gets a stalker.

Highlight Around the World in Eight Simulations is a wondrous feature.



Squint and
you'll see Zergs.

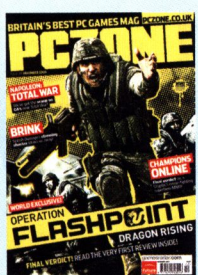


In the future, heads
will be teensy.



DEC

COVER STAR: Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising
DEVELOPER: Codemasters
PUBLISHER: Codemasters



BEST REVIEW OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
SCORE 90% – OPERATION CASHPOINT: SALES RISING

We said: "Not the proper successor to *OpFlash*, but as a game in its own right, it's a stormer."

CLOSE SECOND BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
SCORE 89% – HOLY GREAT GAME, BATMAN!

We said: "If the combat had been a bit more sophisticated in the latter stages of the game, it would of been a nailed-on classic."

WORST REVIEW FARM SIMULATOR 2009
SCORE 21% – SALTED EARTH

We said: "There's no chance of your child virtually buggering a sheep or staring at a horse's bits."

We love an accurate reloading animation.



OUR THOUGHTS

Dave Brown

Staff writer

What's your highlight of 2009?
 Coming back to work after being crippled for months.

What's your game of the year?
 Can I say *The Witcher* again? No? *Empire: Total War* then.

Who is your hero of the year?
 Predictably, CD Projekt again for announcing *The Witcher: Assassins of Kings*.

Who is your villain of the year?
 Anyone who charges for irrelevant DLC.

What's your New Year's resolution?
 To refrain from destroying any more vertebrae.



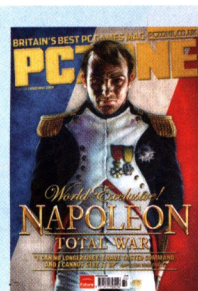
Highlight BlizzCon coverage takes over the mag!

Low point David hurting his back and not being allowed to work for months.

Highlight Ali gets rid of her stalker. But she never reveals how...

XMAS

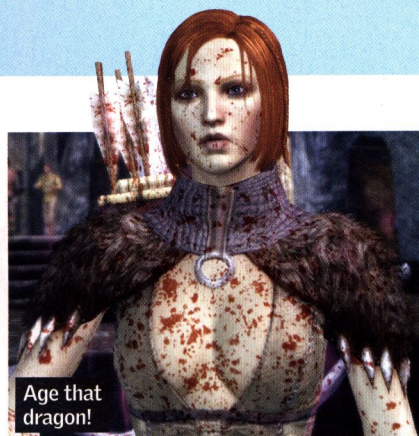
COVER STAR: Napoleon: Total War
DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER: SEGA



Highlight *PC ZONE* veteran Keith Pullin comes to the rescue while David's off sick.

Low point Everything going wrong that possibly could go wrong.

Highlight We get 16 extra pages and *NeverQuest* is back!



Age that dragon!

BEST REVIEW DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
SCORE 93% – A ROLEPLAYING MASTERCLASS

We said: "A brave and brutal return to form for PC fantasy roleplaying. BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG art."

CLOSE SECOND FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
SCORE 88% – STILL THE CHAMP!

We said: "A hugely engrossing management experience that will have lawyers adding an extra box labelled 'Football Manager' to divorce forms."

WORST REVIEW SECTION 8
SCORE 65% – WRONG OUTWEIGHTS THE RIGHT

We said: "Section 8 has a peculiar but not unappealing taste: but once you cash in your non-transferable *Games For Windows – Live* code, its resale value is nil."



Manage their football!

OUR THOUGHTS

Will Porter

Freelance

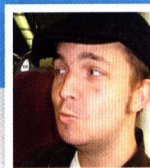
What's your highlight of 2009?
 Watching Jay Z and Eminem while I was at E3, while getting worried phone calls from Log who'd got off a bus in Compton and was fairly sure that he was about to be killed.

What's your game of the year?
Left 4 Dead 2 without much of a doubt – although some individual levels in *Modern Warfare 2* got close to turning my head even more.

Who is your hero of the year?
 The guys at Rocksteady, for pretty much appearing out of nowhere with *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and making it an utter Brit-dev barnstormer.

Who is your villain of the year?
 Infinity Ward for the depressing dedicated server saga, and for flagging up gradual decay of it all used to be in the golden times. And David Cameron, who you shouldn't trust.

What's your New Year's resolution?
 To work out a way in which get out of the house more, yet simultaneously play more games.



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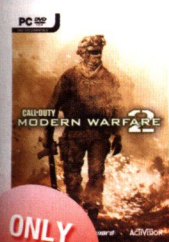
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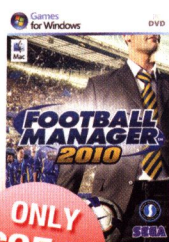
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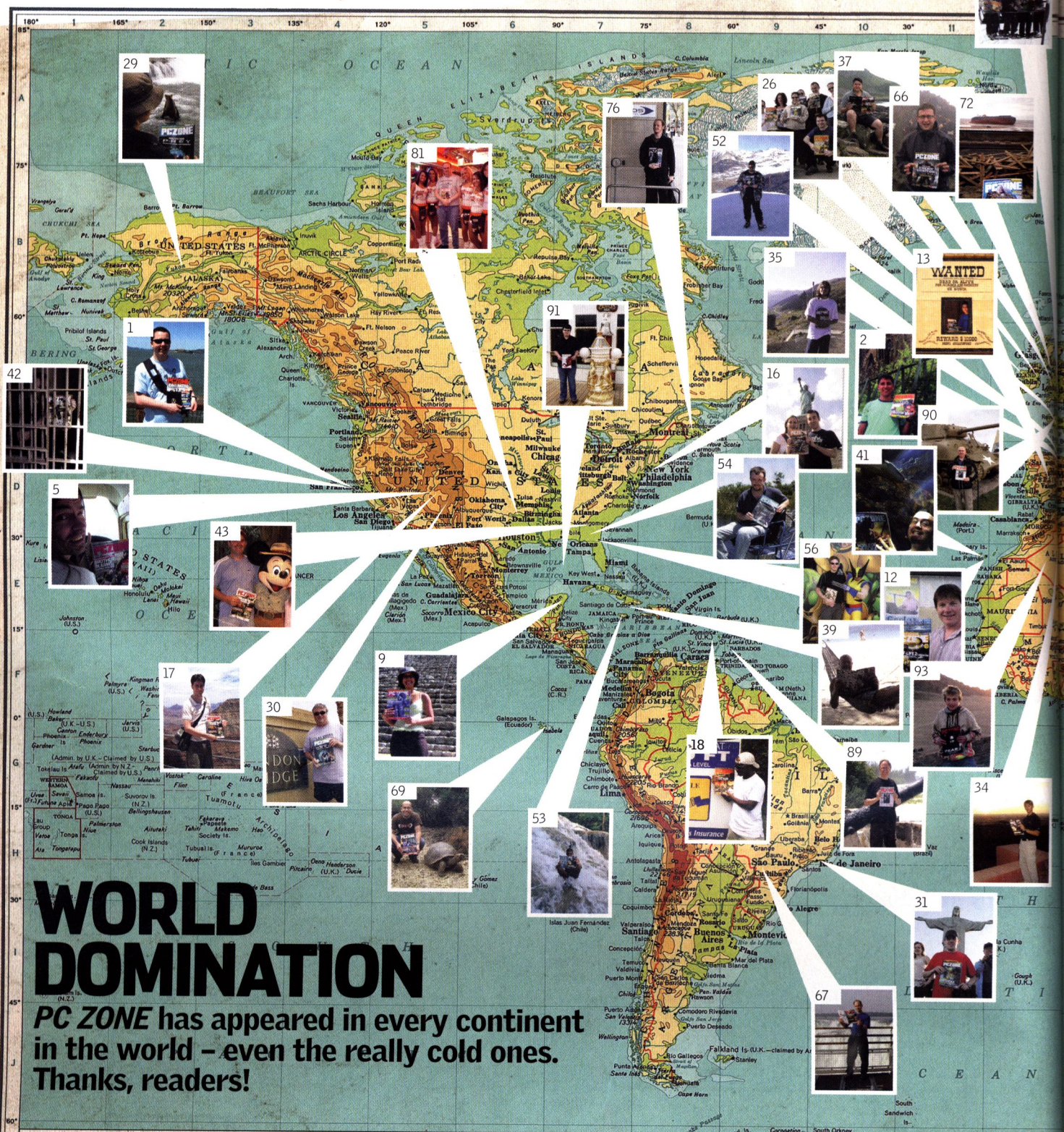
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WORLD DOMINATION

PC ZONE has appeared in every continent in the world – even the really cold ones. Thanks, readers!

WHO, WHERE, BUT NOT WHY

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| 1. James Alcatraz, San Francisco, USA | 5. Matt Stevenson Grand Canyon, USA | 9. Joya Bhattacharyya Caba, Mexico | 14. Jack Wilson Coliseum, Tunisia | 19. Alex Bunton Johannesburg, South Africa | 25. Tom Kirkland Mt Fuji, Japan | 31. Dr Richard Humphreys Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | 37. Jonathan Culver Great Wall of China | 43. The Lindleys Disney World, Florida, USA | 48. Robert Miles Petronas Towers, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia |
| 2. Paul Ricco Barcelona, Spain | 6. Kevin Double Sydney Opera House, Australia | 10. Laura Moffat Coliseum, Rome | 15. Jackie Mulligan Lu Scubblil, Sardinia | 20. Austin Gleeson, Egypt | 26. Donal O' Donnhaill Mayo, Ireland | 32. Martin Ferris, Corfu | 38. Darren Harding Cayo Coco, Cuba | 44. Paul Shank, Maldives | 49. Peter Fisher Cime de Caron, France |
| 3. Adrian Stamp, Egypt | 7. Robert Barclay Burj Al Arab Hotel, Dubai | 11. Christo de Lange Planesburg, South Africa | 16. James Fingleton and Claire Statue of Liberty, USA | 21. Chris Jones Tignes, France | 27. Ross Holmes Mt Kenya, Kenya | 33. Ed Cheong Venice, Italy | 39. Adam Elliston, Corfu | 45. Ian Goldsmith Xian, China | 50. Kay Tinson Glenorchy, New Zealand |
| 4. Steven Tisbury Kabul, Afghanistan | 8. Lee T Koh Sumai, Thailand | 12. Carl Wills Gran Canaria | 17. Philip Ward Grand Canyon, USA | 22. Tom Bennett Trysil, Norway | 28. Martyn Scholes Pitz Gloria, Switzerland | 34. Ross Benford Timoun, Algeria | 40. Stewart Bainbridge Pisa, Italy | 46. Kathryn Humphreys, Uganda | 51. Matt Franks Mount Fuji, Japan |
| | | 13. Lewis Burroughs Mini-Hollywood, Spain | 18. JTECH Grenada, West Indies | 23. Kar Lee, Maldives | 29. Dominic Small, Alaska | 35. Sam Grant, Andorra | 41. Maff Loro Parque, Tenerife | 47. David Leigh Petronas Towers, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | 52. Jim Harvey Vars, France |
| | | | | 24. Jon Henderson The Dead Sea, Jordan | 30. Peter Curtis Lave Havasu, Arizona | 36. Andrew Morgan Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland | 42. Jordan Higgins Alcatraz, San Francisco, USA | | |



53. Lyndon Gallagher
Dumfries River Falls,
Jamaica

54. Jonathan Betts
Everglades, Florida

55. Kelvin Miles
and Family
Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt

56. Greg Walshaw
Islands of Adventure,
Florida, USA

57. Grant Peaker
Vakarufalhi, Maldives

58. Alexander Rootes
The South Pole

59. Garry and
Tracy Turner
Masai Mara, Kenya

60. Pete Fletcher
The Orient Express,
The Orient

61. Chris Tomkins
Taormina, Sicily

62. Chris Man,
Iraq



63. Brett Reed
Okavango Delta,
Botswana

64. Matt K and Zoe S
Great Mosque,
Kashgar, China

65. Rebecca Farley
Ko Bulone, Thailand

66. Ben Eaton
Snowdon, Wales

67. Michael Stout
Iguazu Falls, Brazil

68. Lex Gray, Thailand

69. Damian Paul
Galapagos Islands

70. Jill Davies
A place called
Cool Bananas

71. Mark Stevens
Fox Glacier, New Zealand

72. Graham Anderson
Blackpool, UK

73. Danny Marks
Vogel Mt, Switzerland

74. Tony Black
Sousse, Tunisia

75. Graham Pitt
Victoria Falls, Zambia's
and Zimbabwe's border

76. Matthew Slim
Eidos Montreal, Canada

77. Iain Sisson
Turtle Beach, Tokyo

78. Richard Clement
Helmand Province,
Afghanistan

79. Ean Proctor
Hitler's Tea House,
Germany

80. Liam Shanks
Bremen Airport,
Germany

81. Dave Christofferson
Hooters Bar,
Dallas, Texas

82. John Cusack
Pripyat, Ukraine

83. A blue Sykes monkey
Gedi ruins, Kenya

84. Corp. Rob Stubbs and
Sgt Graham Brown
Baghdad, Iraq

85. Nordin Max
Oslo, Norway

86. David Leigh
Scaramanga's Hideout,
Ko Khao Phing Kan,
Thailand

87. Ben Marks
Kranjska Gora, Slovenia

88. Ben Norris
Lantau Island,
Hong Kong

89. David Woodward
Barbados, Caribbean

90. Roger Judd
Normandy, France

91. Henry Brown
Royal Yacht Britannia,
Gulf of Mexico

92. Russell Baldwin
Mount Pilatus,
Switzerland

93. Mark
Sahara Desert,
North Africa

94. Katie Perrine
Schilthorn, Switzerland

DON'T FORGET YOUR TICKET...

METRO 2033

Jon Blyth checks to see if the underground hit is on track

DEVELOPER 4A PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE 4a-games.com PREVIOUSLY IN issue 201

DIMITRY GLOKHOVSKY **SEEMS** comfortable with his success. The book that was freely distributed on the internet is available in over 20 countries. When we arrived to talk to him, fans heard he's there, and ran home to get their copies of *Metro 2033* for a signing.

Glokhovsky handles this without discomfort or undue pleasure. His vision of post-nuclear Russia has been within him since he was 17, and now, fully realised in a book and a sequel, it has captured the imagination of Russia. Why would a nation that's suffered such extreme hardship in the last century want to read about getting wiped out? Glokhovsky thinks it's because of the current prosperity: no-one believes that it will last.

Now there's no point talking about *Metro 2033* before we clear up the confused issue of what the game is. First, there is not, and never was, a PlayStation 3 version. Forget that video on YouTube, it doesn't, and never did, exist.



Character development extends to finding new guns and exploration equates to finding bonus ammo in a locker. Your character, Artyom, is a classic mute protagonist, jumping and air-teabagging his way through one-sided conversations. It's hardly a criticism to say the game is more like *Half-Life 2* than *Fallout 3*, but developers 4A are keen to clear up the confusion.

Because *Metro 2033* is a story that's yet to be told in English, here's a skeletal version of the book's 600-page plot. When a nuclear attack hits Moscow, no-one knows who was behind it. But for those not privileged enough for a place in Moscow's many bunkers, the equally-

ETA
**MARCH
2010**

But more importantly to you, the readers of *PC ZONE*, there's been a lot of confusion about what kind of game it is. *STALKER* and *Fallout* are games that leap freely from people's mouths: Pavlovian responses to the words "Russian" and "post-apocalypse". In actual fact, *Metro 2033* is a linear FPS.

THE LOWDOWN

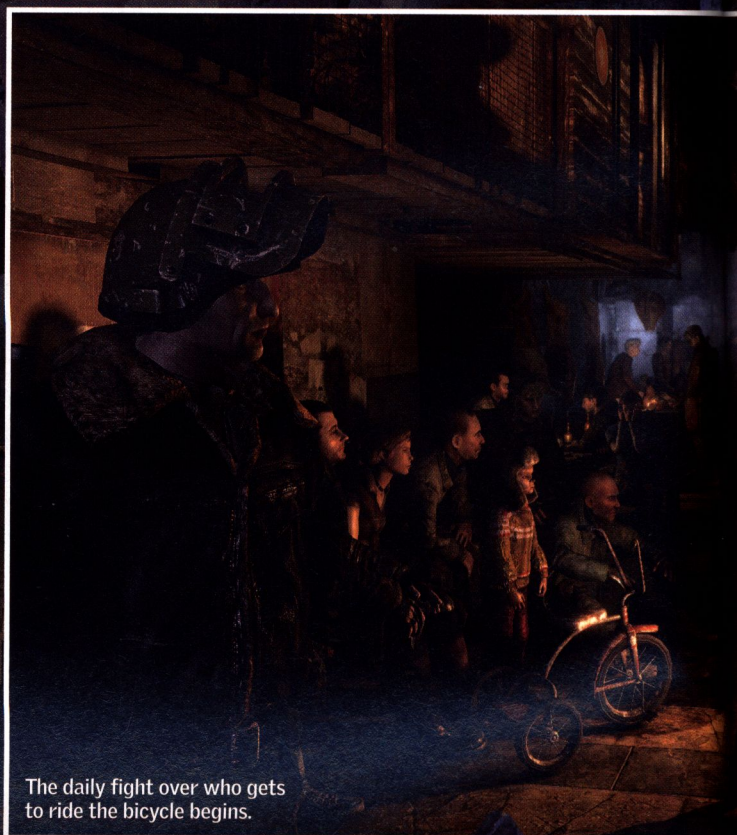
- ✓ Great setting
- ✓ Great story
- ✗ Discouraging money system
- ✗ Combat needs work
- ✗ Contrary design decisions
- ✓ They say it's all in hand

deep Metro system offered an imperfect alternative.

PORK LOVERS

Many people thought "shit, I love sausages, I hope there are pigs in the underground". Luckily, some were close enough to a pig to grab one and take it in with them. So, as humanity perished on the surface, the humans and pigs started a new life together.

The pork diet was balanced with delicious, glowing mushrooms that grew from the walls of the tunnels, and no-one really asked or answered the question about what the hell the pigs ate.



The new Russian stereotype: every man plays the guitar.



THE STORY SO FAR...
**METRO
2033**



THE EBOOK
Glokhovsky publishes his novel for free on the internet.



THE DEVELOPER
4A Games approach Glokhovsky, and he is impressed.



THE NOVEL
English version of the 600-page novel should be available now.



THE GAME
When the videogame is done, a pan-media empire will be finished.

2005

2007

2009

2010

When bullets are currency, getting shot is a mixed blessing.


"Tonight, I get to sleep in the middle. You're always in the middle."

All the weapons and tech are old-school.

"It's hardly a criticism to say the game is more like *Half-Life* than *Fallout 3*"

BATTLING STEREOTYPES

"Contrary to what Tom Clancy says, it's not necessarily Russia who'll launch the nuclear bombs," says Glokhovsky. He's sick of the West saying the nuclear apocalypse will be Russia's fault. So *Metro 2033* is a chance for him and 4A to move on from over-acted Russian stereotypes. Which makes meeting Bourbon so bizarre. He's a big, brash sod who sings crazily to a gate, comes out with strangely put together sentences like "Don't let your two-legged brethren die a foolish death," and has you downing shots with him the second you meet! Despite the late involvement of Hollywood scriptwriters, to English eyes the difference between the authentic and the fictional Russia might not be so noticeable.



Why doesn't fictional radiation mutation never create anything nice?

"Deep underneath the nuclear ash, fascism and communism are flourishing"

➤ Every station became an isolated community, and deprivation breeds extreme politics; deep underneath the nuclear ash, fascism and communism are flourishing, and the occupants of these Station States are pretty hot on killing each other.

Glokhovsky says that this is a reflection of the factional society he sees in Russia today, but that doesn't mean it's inaccessible to anyone ignorant of Russia's day-to-day politics. After all it's difficult to think of any situation in which humans aren't clumping into gangs and chucking rocks at each other. It's a situation that the game developers skirt around slightly, leading us to think that the politics have been toned down for the game. In an opening scene, you're given a rousing lecture (that you can ignore to look at guns), but it's all background stuff.

Anyway, this intra-human conflict detracts from another important set of goings-on – the Dark Ones. These guys are ruddy great nuclear mutants, decorated with matted clumps of patchy fur, lop-sided faces, and rotten mouths. This is where the game's

prologue begins – the ceremonious exit of the subway refuge. This is the tutorial level where every soldier needs to jump, crouch and press E to use something precisely once.

Only this time, instead of someone saying "I underestimated you, perhaps you are the one who can save us" to someone who's still crouching, you're quickly stranded in a white wastland with your limited ammo depleted, being overrun by a stampede of feral, mutated wolf-like creatures with nauseatingly human faces. Many of them rush to the entrance of the subway, but enough stop by your gang to ensure the final depletion of your ammo, and your death.

MIXED MESSAGES

The tutorial also introduces you to a couple of interesting aspects of *Metro 2033*. 4A's attempts to cut the HUD back mean that tapping M brings your objectives up on a clipboard, and a cigarette lighter the other hand. The flame licked towards my right – a moment of spinning around and experimentation confirmed that it was reaching for my next location.

This smart touch was rendered redundant by the considerably less subtle green marker on the compass that was glued onto my clipboard. Other decisions compromise this attempt, too: the filters for the gas masks you have to wear outside only last for five minutes. The time left is communicated by checking your watch. But at the same time, there's an overlay that displays how many filters you've got left. It's the same with bullets left in a clip (shown in context) and clips remaining (shown in the HUD): 4A have been half-arsed and innovative with limiting the HUD.

After the introduction, you're in a Station State, a rich, bustling world of overlapping conversations and pig-trotter salesmanship. The real Moscow

"I've got a good feeling about this, lads."

Metro is a beautiful, expansive network of caverns that makes the London Tube feel like a hamster cage. The areas you move through, however, are smaller tunnels: claustrophobia and clutter make the area much more homely. Areas divided into private rooms, the arguments and private concerns of your neighbours are unavoidable.

Your trip to the next station introduces a gas that knocks out your comrades, but leaves you intact. You a vision of a white featureless world, that demands unexpected actions from you. The natural instinct in a white-flash vision is to assume you're a spectator in a mystical vision. But here if you don't react in certain ways to the vision, you'll find yourself dead in real life, and not entirely sure of the logic behind your death. It'll make sense, as the meaning of the visions becomes clear, but still: an unjustified death is always jarring.

Surprisingly quickly – in Chapter 2, in fact – you're pushed outdoors in the white, mutated world, with a new flying monster that's defied Darwin's laws by simply sprouting wings and having a go at your face.

There are other odd decisions scattered through the first few chapters we're allowed to play. Regenerating health is combined with medkits, which is odd – especially when using the medkits in combat occupies you for about as long as it'd take for you to regenerate. Stranger still, is the currency system.

Grow up, kid.



In a world of ongoing combat, bullets are currency. That makes sense, but the distribution of bullets in the world isn't generous, so conserving bullets is a matter of using your knife. It's an effective knife, to be sure. But as a gameplay decision, scrimping and saving bullets to finally spend on a gun is like letting someone melt your lips together in exchange for a Toblerone.

The problem with the knife – and to a lesser extent, the guns – there's very little sense of impact: no feedback or details to let you know you've stabbed an enemy. Often the Dark Ones will leap at you, and reappear on your opposite side, even if you're backed into a corner, leaving you to whirl around slicing what may or may not be thin air.

WORK CONTINUING

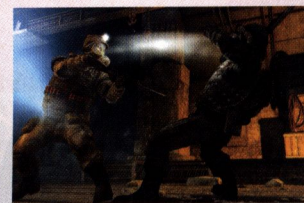
We're given a chance to air our concerns, and nothing we say is met with surprise. On the matter of bullet rationing, we're assured that the balancing isn't finalised, yet, and reminded that we've only played the first couple of hours of the game. But *Metro 2033* does need work, and it's good that 4A are acknowledging that. With the game so linear in its approach to storytelling, everything's on track to be finely tuned by release.

I certainly hope *Metro 2033* manages to get there. There's an immense amount of potential in the setting, and the world that's been created for the men, pigs, and monsters of the new world order. Even the storyline creates some intrigue, with visions implying that the division between man and mutant isn't as clear cut as it may seem.

4A Games have created a great world with *Metro 2033*, and with enough tweaks to the mechanics, the game could be fantastic. **PCZ**

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Metro 2033 kills you in various ways. Here are some from my two hours of play time...



REGULAR DAMAGE

Getting shot, stabbed or mauled by wolves, overlays your sight with blood for a few seconds, before clearing up.



GAS MASK FILTERS

Your gas mask lasts a few minutes – towards the end of that time, your mask will start to steam up, and you'll start to choke. Hold G to change your filter.

RADIOACTIVE WATER

Step into the polluted water that runs through the overground wasteland, and your vision will crackle and spark, as Photoshop's Find Edges filter heralds your imminent death.



GAS MASK DAMAGE

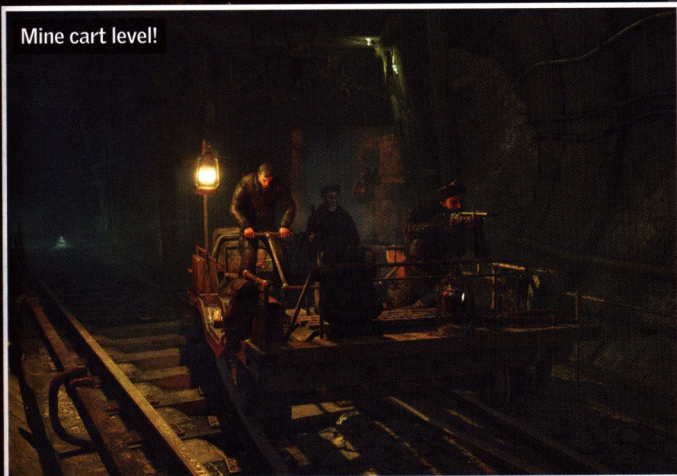
Even with a fresh filter, your mask gets damaged – leaving chips and scratches over your vision for as long as you're outside. Which is a lot of the time, for a game set in the Metro.



HALLUCINATIONS

And if none of those get you, the white visions will...

Mine cart level!



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PHOTO: ISTOCK

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PCZONE – Last one to subscribe is a hastily airbrushed-out third nipple.

ETA
**29 JAN
2010****LOVING THE ALIEN...**

MASS EFFECT 2

**Steve Hill visits a nightclub
and sees a doctor**DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE masseffect.bioware.com

NOBODY CAN ACCUSE BioWare of being lazy. They've just knocked out a 100 or so hours worth of dragon-slaying in *Dragon Age: Origins*, are working on a huge *Star Wars* MMO, and January sees the release of the second chapter of the *Mass Effect* trilogy. It's the latter that we're here to talk about and we're joined by co-founder of BioWare, Dr Ray Muzyka, who's a big deal, even in a state of jet-lagged autopilot.

As he explains for the umpteenth time, "It's the dark second act of the *Mass Effect* trilogy, and you play the role of Commander Shepard. He's a hero or anti-hero depending how you want to play him, but he's charged with solving the mystery of human colonies being abducted by an unknown menace that threatens all life forms in the galaxy.

DUM DUM DUMMMM

"It's even more ominous than the threat you faced in the original *Mass Effect*, so to overcome the challenge you have to build a squad of some of the most badass operatives from across the galaxy."

The specifics of those bad-arsed operatives have been drip-fed to the press, beginning with a deadly assassin called Thane, a violent and unpredictable Krogan by the name of Grunt, and some bald woman with a load of tattoos, otherwise known as Subject Zero. She's a rebellious sort who claims to have "been around, ran with gangs, wiped out some gangs." Like we're dead scared...

BioWare games have always involved moral decisions and their consequences.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Darker and grittier
- ✓ Tight shooting mechanics
- ✓ Involving story
- ✗ A lot of talking



Annnnd "BOO!"

Intriguingly, the decisions you made in the original *Mass Effect* will have some bearing on the sequel. As the good doctor explains, "If you import your save games from *Mass Effect* to *Mass Effect 2* you'll have a different experience. Decisions you made will have an impact in how the story unfolds. In fact, the choices you make in *Mass Effect 2* will have an effect on the outcome of the trilogy. We've always planned for that story arc."

Don't worry if you didn't play the first game though, as *ME2* is "a start-to-finish new experience. You don't have to have played *Mass Effect*, you start afresh, there's a tutorial, we make certain assumptions about what choices you made in the original game and bring you up to speed to give you the context of who you are."

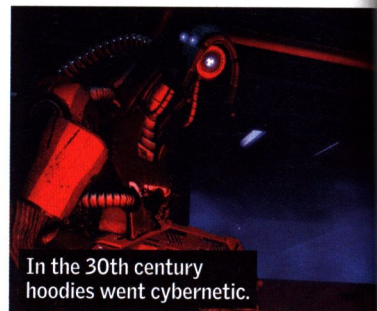
Save games or otherwise, who you are is Commander Shepard, who in our



The Geth have been upgrading.



Garrus is back, even more miserable than before.



In the 30th century hoodies went cybernetic.



The baby vomit gun is just disgusting.



WHAT'S THIS?
Humans find a load of alien tech on the moon. They throw a party.



HOME FROM HOME
The first human colony on an alien world, Eden Prime, is founded.



A SCRAP
Humans meet Turians. Lots of killing follows.



MASS EFFECT
The Shepards save the galaxy. For a time...

2148 CE

2152 CE

2157 CE

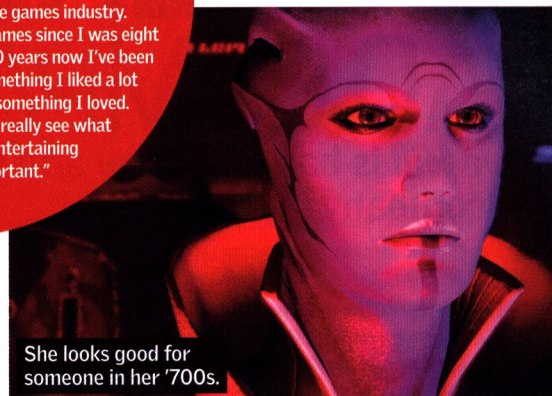
2183 CE



This guy is Legion. He's stalking Shepard.



Kind of hard to tell the robots from the humans.



She looks good for someone in her '700s.

DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE

"I did emergency medicine for about eight years," Muzyka confirms. "Both Greg Zeschuk and I are doctors. We formed BioWare about 15 years ago. I graduated medical school in 1992 and I worked as an emergency room physician in a small town. I haven't practiced in seven or eight years, but yeah I'm a real doctor. I don't know of any others in the games industry. "I've been passionate about videogames since I was eight or nine years old I guess, so over 30 years now I've been playing games. Medicine was something I liked a lot and enjoyed but videogames is something I loved. "Medicine is important, but I really see what we do as pretty noble. Entertaining people is pretty important."

No wait, this guy is Legion. We think. Well those Geth all look the same...

"The game's new shooter elements will enable us to reach a new audience"

Ray Muzyka, BioWare

brief hands-on demo is wandering into a nightclub and taking a long hard look at the exotic dancers, reassuringly affirming the series' adult-oriented status.

Following a chat with a barman we wander down a few corridors and find ourselves involved in a shoot-out.

Utilising the game's location-based damage, we gleefully take someone's leg off. It all seems fairly tight, and as Muzyka says, "It's really as much as

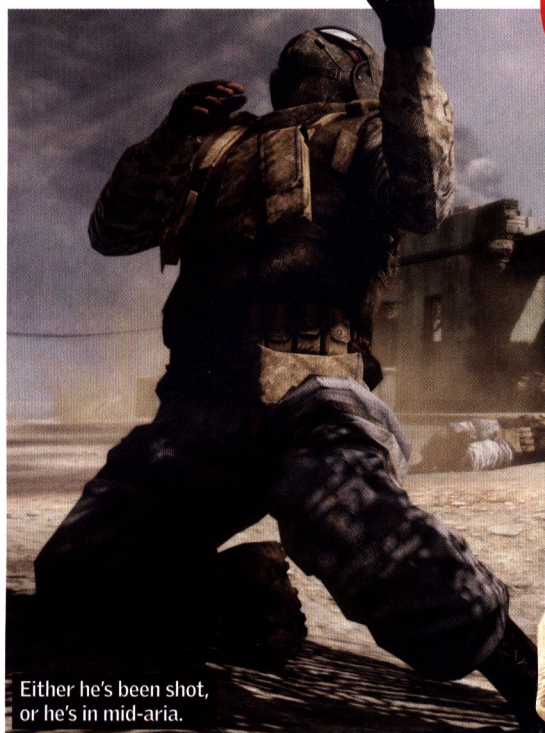
shooter as it's an RPG. We've listened to the feedback from the fans and press on the first *Mass Effect* about the action elements, the emotional intensity of the characterisation, and exploration, the uncharted worlds.

"The shooter intensity is really high, the controls, the frame rate, the textures load really smoothly. I think the shooter experience is going to feel as tight as the best shooters."

This shouldn't scare off the RPG purists though. "I think it'll broaden the audience," says Muzyka. "But the RPG fans are going to love it to because you've still got a lot of the things that they love about BioWare games and *Mass Effect 1* in terms of choices, emotional intensity, characters, the narrative and story flow and the progression, customisation, exploration. But the game's new shooter elements will enable us to reach a new

audience that maybe haven't played RPGs before."

As for that all-important narrative, Muzyka says, "We use characters and companions as a mirror of your choices and a lens through which you see the world." Throw in an art style that doffs its cap to '80s sci-fi movies, and *Mass Effect 2* is shaping up to be one of the key releases of next year. As Muzyka says, "It's a galaxy on a disc." **PC7**

ETA
**5 MARCH
2010**

Either he's been shot,
or he's in mid-air.

IT'S COMING HOME...

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Steve Hill is bad company and keeps bad company

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE battlefield.ea.com

TIME WAS YOU knew where you stood with *Battlefield*. That was in 1942, fighting World War II in a game that pioneered online military-based multiplayer action. Since then we've had *Vietnam, 2142*, back to 1943, *Modern Combat*, *Special Forces*, something about *Heroes*, and of course *Bad Company*. Except we didn't get *Battlefield: Bad Company*, the series betraying its PC roots in favour of a console-only spin-off.

A lighter affair than the core franchise, *Bad Company* saw you playing

one of four ne'er-do-wells thrown together in the name of war and inevitably overcoming the odds with explosive action and comedy one-liners. While it was easy for PC snobs to accuse it of dumbing down the franchise, the Frostbite engine provided supremely destructible scenery, the squad-based single-player campaign was tight – if artificially difficult – and the multiplayer was a frenetic 24-player scramble with a chaotic mode called Gold Rush.

This time us PC chimps are allowed to the party, and *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* promises more of the same, but naturally bigger, better, and, er, badder. And possibly slightly easier. As producer Gordon Van Dyke admits of the original game, "I think we made it too hard to kill people. In a shooter game people want to kill people. So we've upped damage and the pacing is a lot better, it's tuned more.

Again, utterly too well-equipped to be a real soldier.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Destructible scenery
- ✓ 32-player action
- ✓ It's on PC this time
- ✓ Dedicated server support
- ✗ No modding tools

THE STORY SO FAR... BATTLEFIELD



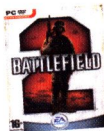
IT'S WAR
Battlefield 1942 gets the multiplayer war ball rolling. Strong.

2002



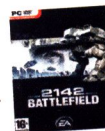
NAPALM DEATH
Battlefield Vietnam is nowhere near as good. Misjudged.

2004



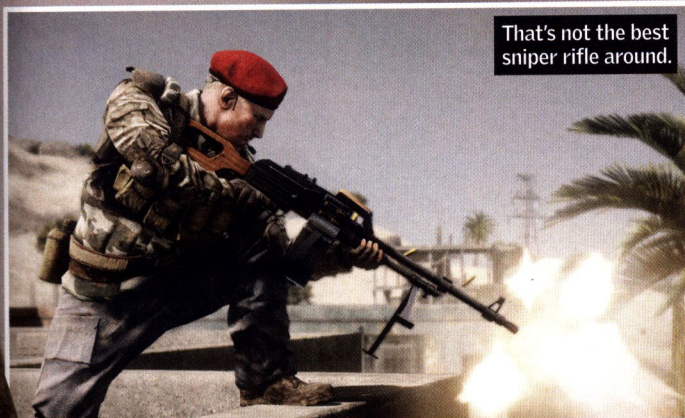
NUMBER TWO
Battlefield 2 brings the action to the present day. Tense.

2005



FUTURE SHOCK
Battlefield 2142 is set in the new ice age. Preposterous.

2006



That's not the best sniper rifle around.

"I think *Battlefield* as a whole, we've been doing it so long we're like a chef who knows the exact amount of spice to put in if they want it a little bit spicier, or how to make it a little more savoury or a little more sweet."

More specifically, the game involves not a food fight but an entirely fictional conflict between the USA and Russia. Taking place on the western coast of the Americas, the action – both single-player and multiplayer – will play out all the way from Alaska down to Chile, which obviously offers something of a mixed

bag in terms of environments, covering familiar arid areas as well as jungle, alpine, foothills, and barren snowscapes.

As for that multiplayer, it will feature a massive 32 players, as opposed the console version's paltry two dozen. "Frostbite is a leading technology," says Van Dyke "It's not for the faint of heart. For PC we're able to squeeze more juice out of it and get it up to 32. Also it's a version that's being developed specifically for the PC. The core guts of the game and the idea is there but everything is being re-tweaked and everything is being balanced specifically for the PC." Hurray.

Included in the four multiplayer modes is the classic Conquest, a staple of the *Battlefield* series since its inception, and an objective-based affair called Rush, which has its roots in *Battlefield 2*. As Van Dyke says, "There's been a lot of trials and tribulations in making this right, and we nailed it with this, bringing multiplayer into an open environment sandbox." As for the other two modes, they're yet to be announced but will apparently feature "really cool squad-oriented gameplay."

FIVE ALIVE

Due to logistics (we're in the dairy again) we couldn't manage a full 32-player affair but did have the chance to dabble with a five-vs-five multiplayer match, finding it a moderately engaging experience. With a steadier pace than *Modern Warfare 2*, some definite strategy was required, even if that meant jumping in the nearest Humvee and driving at the enemy until they inevitably slaughtered you. And with the level set in a dusty decimated town, it looked almost exactly like a scene from HBO series *Generation Kill*.

With the emphasis on vehicular warfare, as well as the obligatory Humvee you'll be able to take the controls of helicopters, tanks and jeeps as you throw yourself into a massive virtual war. Furthermore, each player will be able to utilise some 15,000 character specialisations, ensuring that everybody on the battlefield is different.

The *Battlefield* series may have been usurped by the *Modern Warfare* behemoth in recent years, but those Swedes at DICE know how to throw together a decent multiplayer war. *Battlefield's* coming home. **PCZ**



Now that's a proper stand off.



THE MOD SQUAD

Almost as soon as the first *Battlefield* game was released, the modding community was all over it like a soup sandwich, arguably proving instrumental in forging the franchise's future. Modders won't have things so easy with *Bad Company 2* though, as producer Gordon Van Dyke explains by way of an automotive analogy.

"When older cars were out people were able to do a lot with them: take out the seats, put in engines that didn't even belong to that type of car, and you could do a lot more, it was a lot easier. Now we've reached a level where our technology for Frostbite is really complicated and we're still trying to develop better tools for us. It's really complex."

"Quick! Call 999 and get the fire service!"

"This time us PC chimps are allowed to the party"



Can't we all be friends?

THIS IS THE END...

COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT

Steve Hill takes on Kane in the final instalment of the RTS classic

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE commandandconquer.com PREVIOUSLY IN issue 212

CAN IT BE true? Is this the last ever *Command & Conquer*? Has Kane finally met his match?

Respectively: Apparently, ditto, and it would appear so. We'll believe it when we see it, but according to assistant producer Matt Ott, "We're really going to wrap it up this time."

It's mildly terrifying to consider that the first *C&C* game came out in 1995 but

it's one of those rare games that can genuinely claim to have pioneered a genre. Real-time strategy may not be the poster boy for the PC it once was, but the development team at EA are refusing to rest on their sizeable laurels, and are indeed introducing fundamental gameplay changes for this fourth and, allegedly, final fling.

name suggests, can stagger to a point on the map and unpack into a fully working base. Furthermore, should your base be destroyed, you can simply

redeploy the crawler, even switching to a different class. Yes, there are

three classes, namely offence, defence and support. Bluff traditionalists needn't panic however: "There's a lot of classic elements in there," says Ott.

"If you choose to play a defensive class you'll be able to fortify, hold down an area, build up around it. You'll still

ETA
MARCH
2010

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Mobile bases
- ✓ Three classes
- ✓ Persistent progression
- ✓ PC exclusive
- ✗ Serious acting

TURTLING AHEAD

As any fools knows, one of the key concepts of *C&C* is fortifying your base, hunkering down and clinging on for dear life, repelling all that the enemy throws your way. Not any more. Step forward the crawler mobile base, which as the

With their tanks and their bombs.



THE STORY SO FAR... COMMAND & CONQUER



C&C
The original arrives, and changes strategy gaming forever.

1995



RED ALERT
This spin-off starts a series with a similarly lengthy lifespan.

1996



TIBERIAN SUN
Sequel that, in today's terms, was knocked out pretty swiftly.

1999

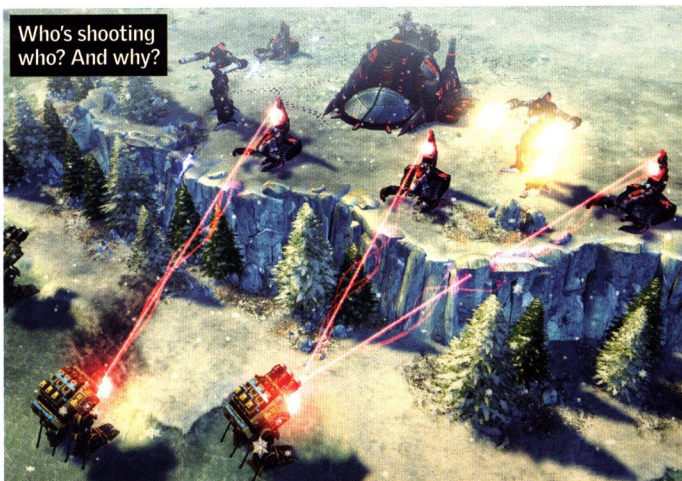


TIBERIUM WARS
Officially number three in the core series, it's largely well received.

2007



Who's shooting who? And why?



A classic Nod vs GDI encounter.



It's all about the Tiberian. Green gold.



Defend the base.
Or build another one.

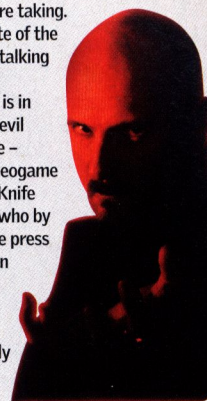
HEY JOE! Kane unable

Command & Conquer has always clung to its '90s roots with full-motion video cut scenes that can politely be described as dog shit. Not this time though.

"The live-action cinematics are much more gritty and real," says assistant producer Mat Ott. "In the past we've relied on the cheesiness to carry them. This time we're trying to tell a really good story and really wrap up the saga and give it the treatment it deserves."

"I think people will like the new direction we're taking. This is the fate of the planet we're talking about here."

That fate is in the hands of evil dictator Kane – played by videogame Swiss Army Knife Joe Kucan – who by the end of the press day was sat in front of his monitor in a woolly jumper, gently snoozing.



have access to classic buildings like super weapons: the Temple Of Nod, the GDI Ion Cannon. So that kind of bunker down and build up your base gameplay still exists in the game, we've just added the offensive and support classes for people who work together as a team.

"Offence class is more tank-oriented, you also have the commander unit; and the support class has access to the airport, they're very mobile, quick, and they also have player powers that can be used anywhere on the battlefield.

"Any of those classes is going to have all the tools you need to be successful. It

is possible to have a team of five offensive players and still win a match. However, the classes really play to each other's strengths by working together as a team."

END OF AN ERA

It's a lot to take on board at once, particularly for someone who struggled to complete the demo of the original *C&C*, which came on a floppy disc and was played on something called a 486.

This time round, I'm on a 10-PC LAN in a disused dairy in East London, sat next to none other than Kane himself,

or at least the man who plays him, Joe Kucan.

There's no shame in admitting that I make a pig's ear of my time with *C&C4*, simply sending all of my troops to a fiery death before trying again with a different class, and similar results. It's almost a relief when my PC crashes, sparing me the indignity of another crushing defeat. Although I later learn that I've been playing at level 20 – the highest. Yes, there are RPG-style levels, with persistent player progression throughout the entire game, whether in you're in campaign, skirmish or multiplayer mode.

Although in terms of story it's a classic Nod vs GDI scenario – The Scrin, *C&C3*'s purple aliens, having been dropped – *C&C4* appears to be

advancing the genre that the original *Command & Conquer* founded.

The advancements will also impact on the single-player campaign, which will be fast-paced and heavily reliant on map awareness, albeit more forgiving in that you can simply redeploy your crawler, whenever your base is wiped out.

So is this really the end? Ott is adamant: "This is the epic conclusion of the Tiberian saga, the story that we started back in 1995. It's going to be the conclusion of Kane's plan, GDI versus Nod, the fate of the world, the fate of Tiberian, it's all here. It's going to wrap up the saga." **PC7**

"C&C4 appears to be advancing the genre that C&C founded"

ETA
**WINTER
2010**

That looks like a Force Grip.

FEEL THE FORCE...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Steve Hill is not the droid you're looking for

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER LucasArts WEBSITE starwarstheoldrepublic.com PREVIOUSLY IN... issue 213

NOT THAT LONG ago, in this galaxy, LucasArts and BioWare announced a massively multiplayer online role-playing game set in the *Star Wars* universe. Or at least some version of it. As BioWare producer Blaine Christine says, "What's important about the setting is we're about 3,000 years before the events of the original films, which is a great opportunity for us to actually work with LucasArts to define the history of the *Star Wars* universe." In other words, they're making it up as they go along.

We've seen *The Old Republic* a couple of times, at E3 and GamesCom, and on each occasion it was described as "Knights Of The Old Republic 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7," a well-worn sound bite that, if nothing else, represents something of a bargain.

The other key point that has been repeatedly stressed is that *TOR* (as the

cool kids are calling it) will be the first ever MMORPG in which every single character is voiced. From Sith Lords to stormtroopers, some poor sod has sat in a studio recording thousands of lines of dialogue for you to sit through when what you all really want to do is take someone's arm off with your lightsaber.

THE OLD GUYS

As for the all-important character classes, we've already been told about the Jedi Knight, Smuggler and Trooper (Republic) and the Sith Warrior, Imperial Agent and Bounty Hunter (Imperial). Improbably, the final pair was unveiled in a mock-up of a spaceship interior in a disused dairy in east London. Drum rolls please for the Jedi Consular and Sith Inquisitor.

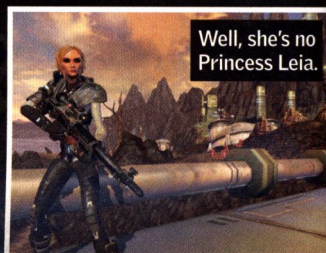
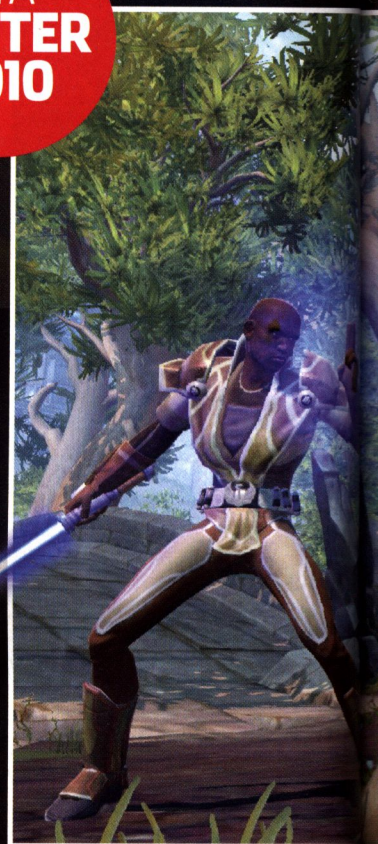
The former is something of a Yoda character, or an older Obi-Wan Kenobi, taking a more thoughtful approach to combat by employing telekinetic powers and throwing in the odd Mind Maze: "These aren't the droids you're looking for." As for the Sith Inquisitor, think of the gnarled face of the Emperor, using Force Lightning from a distance, while still being handy with a lightsaber.

According to producer Blaine Christine, the philosophy in creating

classes differs from traditional MMOs: "Rather than come across this in a way that was 'We're building an MMO, what archetypes or classes do we need within an MMO?' what we went for is this is first and foremost a *Star Wars* game so we want iconic characters and moments from *Star Wars*. It should pretty quickly evoke some imagery.

"If you think about Jedi Knight, you think about Luke Skywalker. If you think about the Bounty Hunter you think about Boba Fett, and obviously that is all deliberate."

A further reveal is that characters will have companions, which if you think of that walking carpet that followed Han Solo around does make vague sense. Specific companions were revealed in the shape of the Jedi Consular's mate



Well, she's no Princess Leia.

Kenval, who gets in close to absorb damage, and the Sith Inquisitor's pal Xalek The Kaleesh, an apprentice much like Darth Maul to The Emperor.

Having previously played the game in Germany and leathered some stormtroopers, this time round we got to play as a Sith Inquisitor in a proper quest. Switching the monitor on to find ourselves eyeballing some bloke, he turned out to be the quest-giver and started going on about something called The Hate Machine.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ First fully voiced MMO
- ✓ New *Star Wars* story
- ✓ Varied classes
- ✓ Involving combat
- ✗ Stylised graphics

A Sith Warrior gets stuck in.



THE STORY SO FAR...
**STAR WARS:
THE OLD REPUBLIC**



STAR WARS
Man with beard makes
idiotic film. It'll never
catch on.

1977



KOTOR
BioWare's *Knights Of
The Old Republic* nails
the *Star Wars* RPG.

2003



GALAXIES
Meanwhile, Sony show
us how not to make
a *Star Wars* MMO.

2003



THE SITH LORDS
The sequel is not made
by BioWare, and is
consequently inferior.

2005



Would somebody
please hit someone?

CUSTOMISE IT

Han the healer

As any MMO player will confirm, customising your character is key to enjoying yourself if you're going to be stuck with them for hundreds of hours. As producer Blaine Christine says, "Part of that is understanding there are different play styles. You've got solo-ers who want to go through the game by themselves and experience the story.

Or maybe you're more of a social gamer and you're going to be in a group."

We were shown the example of the Smuggler (effectively Han Solo) who can be a Gunslinger – a smooth talker who employs cover and dual pistols – or a Scoundrel who specialises in stealth, up-close combat, and crucially, medicine, effectively making him a healer. Who knew Han had such a sensitive side?



He'll either charm
you or fix you.

Given a multiple choice of three different answers, each primed with attitude, we could either refer to his story as "Fascinating," ask him "And you are?" or simply dismiss the whole scheme as "Crazy."

Though we didn't have an opportunity to test it, we suspect the outcome of that discussion would have been the same, and as such we found ourselves charged with the task of heading into a tomb in order to disable the aforementioned Hate Machine. Finding it on a map was easy enough, as

was battling the few random enemies en route. Unlike other MMOs, there's no auto attack in *TOR*, so you have to select your powers wisely, and we took great pleasure in meting out a few blasts of Force Lightning.

Having found The Hate Machine in a ruined atrium, we were informed that disabling it involved jamming it with a set number of corpses of the giant flesh-eating K'Lor'Slugs squelching around the immediate environs. Job done, we were escorted from the room by R2-D2. **PCZ**

"What's important about the setting is we're about 3,000 years before the events of the original films"


Blaine Christine, Producer, BioWare

The graphics
hint at low-spec
mass appeal.

BATTLE ROYALE

*David Brown takes a reality check: just how real
is Napoleon: Total War?*

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE totalwar.com PREVIOUSLY IN issue 214



EVERYONE KNOWS ALL about the *Total War* series and its globe-spanning campaigns and battles, but one of the things lacking has been a real focus on the actual historical conflicts that took place. Often, a disappointing handful of token battles were cobbled together quickly to be played maybe once or twice and then discarded in favour of create-your-own scenarios.

The Alexander add-on for *Rome: Total War* bucked that trend, giving us a superb-yet-short set of narrative-linked battles plucked directly from history. From Issus through Gaugamela to Hydaspes, we were placed in Alexander's sandals and given the task of succeeding where he had, er, succeeded.

This is the expansion that *Napoleon: Total War* most closely resembles, except bigger and, hopefully, better. It won't have Brian Blessed in it, though, unless I'm massively misinformed.

The proof of a battle's pudding is in the playing, of course. In a sweets, crisps and chocolate-filled day down at Creative Assembly's Horsham studios, I got the chance to envelop myself in historical battle loveliness. And now I'm here, gorged on unhealthy foods, to report back on how *Napoleon's* gameplay is shaping up.

The battles on display were Lodi and the Pyramids, the former played against the AI and the latter a head-to-head against the deputy editor of another PC games mag who shall remain nameless.



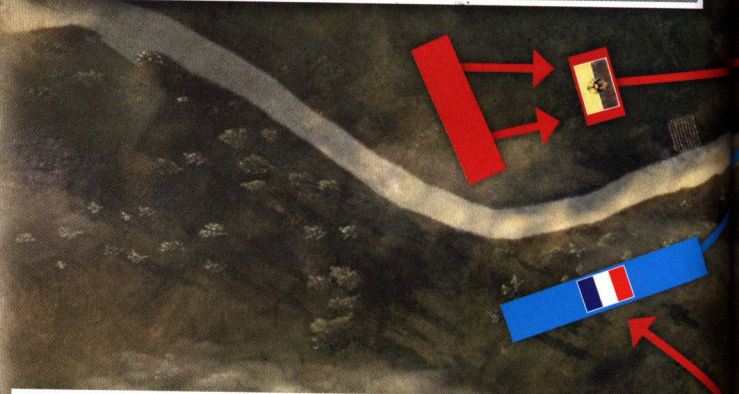
MAP 1**BATTLE OF LODI****10 MAY, 1796**

(1.45pm, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY STUDIOS)

5ft 2in of pure cunning.

BLESSED RELIEF

If there were to be a narrator speaking over these proceedings, who should it be? After ruling undersized applicants such as Michael J Fox and Joe Pesci, the person who we think should absolutely, positively feature in *Napoleon: Total War* is clearly going to be the squeaky voiced Joe Pasquale. Can you imagine anyone better suited to the role? I think not.



Kilts give a +1 nudity bonus.

**THE SETUP**

With Napoleon's forces chasing the Austrian defenders up along the south bank of Po River, the time came to make a stand. When the battle was joined, as you can see, the French units are tightly bunched, while the Austrians are scattered about the place.

Each side have their own advantages: the French have the ability to move and fire as one big unit, concentrating fire on a smaller front and having strength in numbers, while the Austrians will be less vulnerable to cannon fire while they remain spread out.

INITIAL MOVES

The Austrian AI immediately set about strengthening its position in the centre of the town, moving units in from the west and reinforcing the eastern bank of the Po, over the Lodi Bridge itself. The objective for the French, other than killing a load of Austrians, is to prevent Feldzeugmeister Johann Beaulieu (the enemy general) from retiring from the battlefield. No mean task, as he's safely tucked away on the other side of the bridge with, naturally, the bulk of his army protecting him. The French, as in me, need to move quickly and decisively in order to prevent this from



KEY

- Initial Moves
- Ambushed
- Endgame



IN REALITY

The Austrian general did actually manage to escape the field, but the importance of this battle wasn't in the victory itself, which was indecisive at best. The real significance of this encounter was the solidification of Napoleon's belief that he was destined for great things, and that his strategic genius was unparalleled. Basically, it was a huge ego boost for him.

happening. French cannons unlimber and begin to fire on the Austrian positions, while I make the decision to detach a small chunk of my army to intercept some of the Austrians moving to reinforce the town. Battle is joined on the western road and two Austrian cavalry units are driven from the field. The rest of the French force moves inexorably towards the town.

CLOSING RANKS

The detachment that saw off the two Austrian cavalry units remains poised on the western side of the battlefield. The AI reacts to the danger and moves a

substantial clump of men towards them. As the main bulk of the French army is now approaching the town, it is easy to reinforce the western position and battle is properly joined in the field outside of town. The French fight defensively, holding their positions while the two cavalry units harass the flanks of the Austrian infantry, causing them to panic. Sure enough, the Austrians have had it, dropping arms and pegging it back across the field. Half of the Austrian army is now running for the hills and I wheel my left flank around, partially encircling the town. Vicious street

fighting begins and both armies whittle away at each other.

CHASED DOWN

The Austrian commander decides it's time to leave, but I won't let the swine get away. As he meanders along the eastern path to safety, the cavalry, that have already secured my victory for me, ford the river to the north and intercept him. Mere seconds before he leaves the scene, they catch him, slaughtering his unit and claiming victory for the French.

The rest of the Austrian forces, stranded in the centre of town, fight on

until a handful remain, their morale broken and, eventually, their bodies strewn around the town streets.

A sound 'defensive attack' strategy won the day here, with the Austrians unable to break Napoleon's advance.

PCZONE

REAL-O-METER

★★★★★

Fully Lodi

MAP 2**BATTLE OF THE PYRAMIDS****21 JULY, 1798**

(1.15pm, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY STUDIOS)



Napoleon surveys his troops before the battle.

THE SETUP

One of Napoleon's most famous victories was earned against a combined Ottoman and Mamluk force, that entered the field a few miles from the Pyramids.

Again, both armies had advantages over the other: the French had superior troops and cannon, while the Mamluks were used to fighting in deserts. They also had units of fearsome cavalry, which they'd have to use effectively to win.

INITIAL MOVES

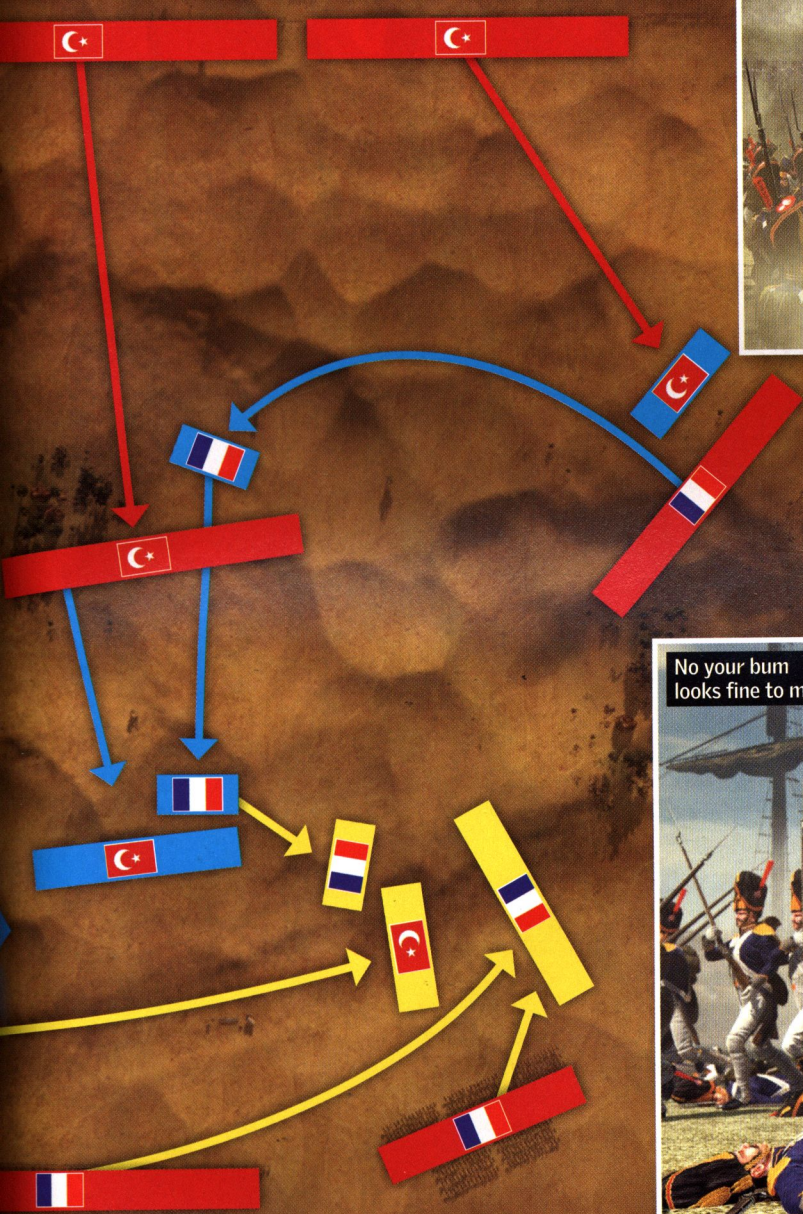
This time it would be a human opponent that faced off against me. His cocky swagger didn't put me off my game and my men steeled themselves for his brash onslaught. As you can see on the map, my initial movements were minor at best, mainly straightening out the line and allowing myself to bring more men forward to fire when necessary. My thin lines would be easily broken if engaged by cavalry,

KEY

- █ Initial Moves
- █ Ambushed
- █ Endgame

but the plan was to make sure the enemy horses didn't get anywhere near them.

Sitting in my defensive position, I watched as the Mamluks advanced, noticing that my small collection of units defending the nearby village was being approached by Mamluk cavalry. Two infantry units lined along an impassable slope, meaning the enemy had to funnel through a narrow gap if they wanted to engage. A volley of musket fire took out a surprising number and the charge faltered. The unit defending the gap swiftly reordered itself into a square formation and the reckless Mamluk



IN REALITY

Napoleon didn't use the thin line formations that were only partially effective for me. He went with a massive divisional square, showing off his ingenuity and great tactical ability. The Mamluk cavalry was rendered null and void by this defensive formation and, being as they were the only real quality troops the opposition had, this ensured victory for Napoleon's army.



charge was easily seen off. This was the key moment in the battle.

AMBUSHED

With his left flank broken, I seized the opportunity, sending a lone cavalry unit around behind the enemy lines. My opponent was too busy focusing on the joining of battle between our main lines to notice, and my cavalry came smashing into his limbered cannons, moving swiftly between each unit and destroying them with minimal casualties suffered.

Amazingly, I was able to take out every one of my opponents cannons

before he noticed. Without their support, my front line, backed up sufficiently by their own cannons, stood firm. The battle looked to be going my way for a crushing victory, but the Ottoman's and Mamluk's advantage in terms of troop numbers proved important on my left flank. Sheer weight of numbers finally destroyed it and some swift reorganisation was necessary to prevent a disaster.

ENDGAME

Anticipating the collapse, I had begun to wheel the rest of my line around, reorganising them into a smaller, more

compact fighting force. No longer worried about cannon fire, I could reduce the length of the line and not worry about cannonballs thudding into my packed ranks.

Fierce fighting on my left flank had weakened his advancing infantry, who were further disadvantaged by having a number of melee-only units in their ranks. My muskets whittled their numbers down, before a final flanking cavalry charge burst through their line from the side and sent them packing.

In the end, a dominant victory had been prevented by the vast numbers of

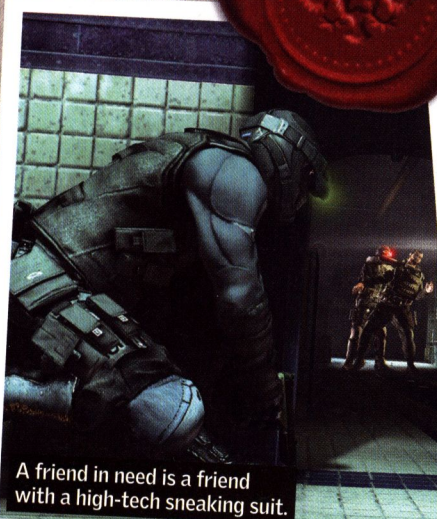
the opposing force, but my opponent's failure to protect his cannons meant his men were just too beleaguered by the time final battle was joined to see me off. It just shows: failing to pay attention to aspects of a battle is a fatal mistake.

PCZONE

REAL-O-METER

★★★★☆

In the Nile



A friend in need is a friend with a high-tech sneaking suit.

SNEAK FOR YOURSELVES...

SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Two-men, one co-op. **Steve Hogarty** takes the stealth online...


DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** splintercell.uk.ubi.com **PREVIOUSLY IN** issue 211

A **CHOKER HOLD IS** a great bonding experience. Not between you and the man who's holding a gun to your head – there'll always be a tragic, longing awkwardness in that relationship – but between you and your fellow player, the guy flitting from shadow to shadow, circling around to spring up behind your captor and snap his neck like a bony pencil.

Or maybe, if he's got one of his execution moves prepared, your friend will poke a hole between the eyes of the

guard with Bauer-like aloofness. For these situations *Splinter Cell Conviction* needs a Manly Hug button, because when one spy helps out another, the mutual appreciation for one another's usefulness is almost tangible.

We're playing the third map in *Conviction's* co-operative campaign, Yastreb Complex, a small part of a five-hour long prologue to the events of the single player game. The two-player campaign is a game in itself, taking in new locations and seen through the luminescent goggles of two new characters. The story goes that Third Echelon notices that three of the US' nukes have vanished, and must jump into bed with their Russian-counterpart, Voron, in order to track them down and save the world. It's James Bond in spandex with big thigh muscles.

Enter Archer, the green-goggled Fisher-lite character, 

"Cos we are gonna be forever, you and me."

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Truly interdependent co-op
- ✓ Five-hour co-op campaign
- ✓ Deniable Ops for replayability
- ✓ XP, we love XP
- ✗ No Spies vs Mercs

Номер 12-301. Файл СВР

[ENGLISH TRANSLATION]

OBJECT: KESTREL
N: FIELD OPERATIVE
N: VORON, SVR

MIDDLE NAME
Andreyev

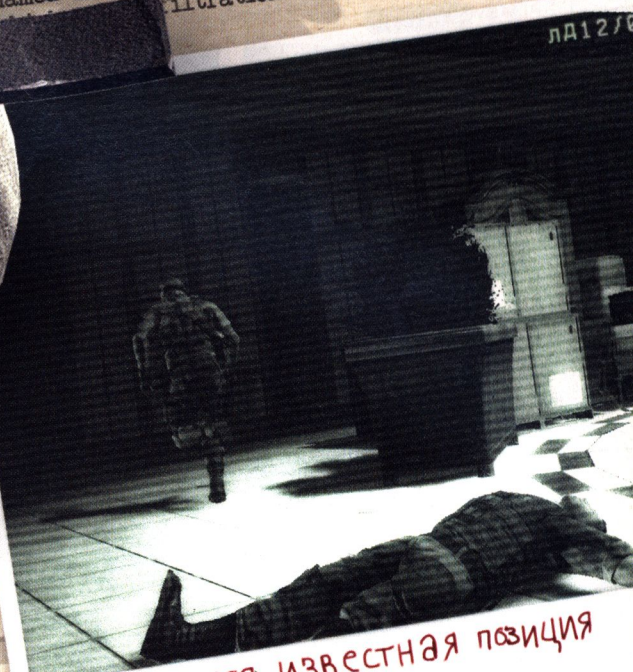
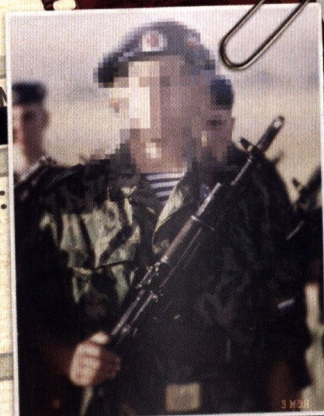
FAMILY NAME

MARITAL STATUS

HEIGHT: 175 cm
WEIGHT: 75 kg

ederation

... military dossier
and misfortune. His
ostuous and violent
me to live on
s run-ins
his per
ussia
...
... that is known is that he is no stranger to
... when he was six;
... at the age of 14 he
... his foster father, and at the age of 14 he
... for more than four harrowing
... was arrested at age ... and turned
... Unlike many conscripts, ... thrived in the
... quickly transferred to a ... and ...
... neutralizing ...
... an incident where his entire unit was ambushed
... witness the systemic executions of his friends.
... came to his rescue. After
... before ... approached Loskov to
... named ... infiltration and information



после дня известная позиция

шифр 16, полная блокировка

"The two-player
campaign is a
game in itself"

SUBJECT: Archer

OCCUPATION: "Splinter Cell"

AFFILIATION: National Security Agency

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| NAME Daniel | MIDDLE NAME Robert | FAMILY NAME [redacted] |
|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| DATE OF BIRTH MARCH 23, [redacted] | MARITAL STATUS single | HEIGHT 5'10" | WEIGHT 165 lbs | HAIR brown |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|

BIRTHPLACE
[redacted]

BACKGROUND
Earning an economics degree at [redacted] joined the [redacted] to pursue a career as an intelligence analyst. While at the Agency, Daniel interpreted signal intercepts connected to dozens of terror plots, and personally identified the leadership of extremist group, the [redacted]. Though Daniel proved to be a highly capable analyst, his deeply-entrenched resentment of authority created considerable tension with his superiors at [redacted]. [redacted] soon began to chafe against the bureaucratic confines of his job. Fortunately for him, his personnel file was flagged for potential field duty by recruiters for [redacted] and Anna [redacted] quickly approved his admission to the group's gruelling training program. [redacted] later, he was assigned his call-sign, [redacted].

COVER (FIELD AGENT PROTECTION PROGRAM)

ALIAS: [redacted]

OCCUPATION: [redacted]

ADDRESS: [redacted]

NOTES
- stubborn
- overconfident
- competitive

Do we have
D-130 & 131
in transit?
we must have 50
frt. immediately

LE
VO
[redacted]

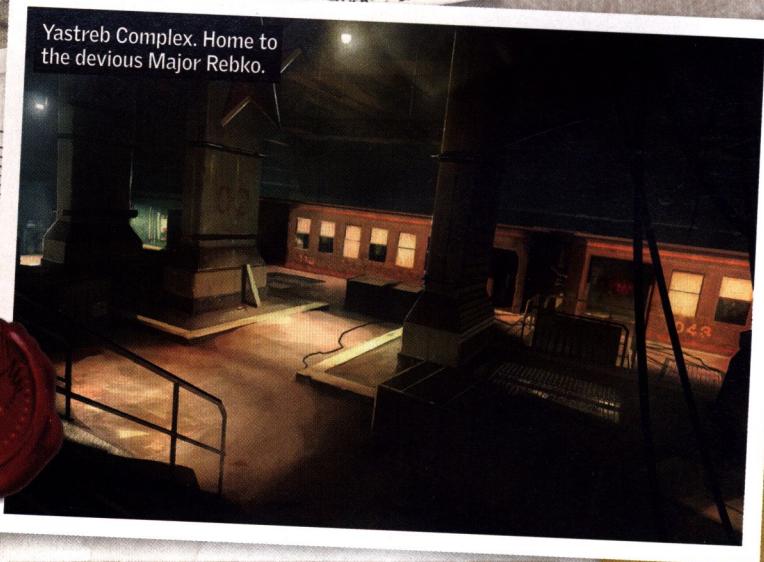
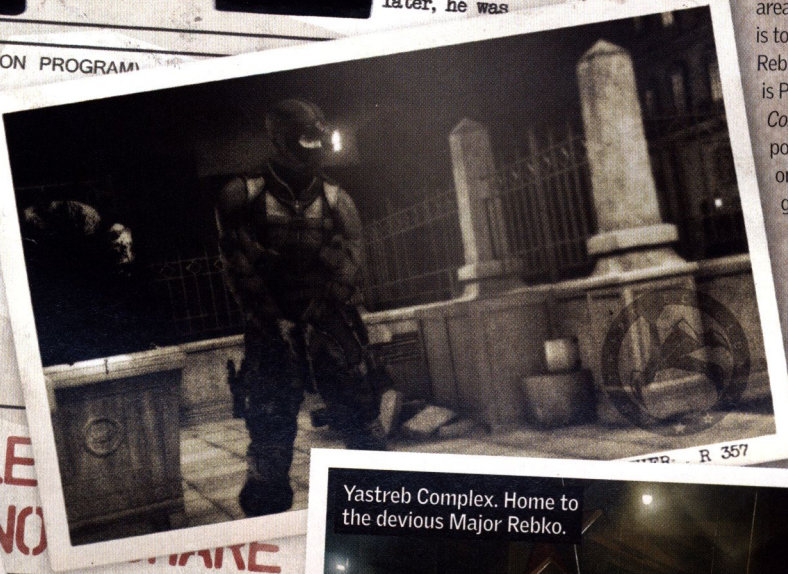
MAJORITY
EYES ONLY

ROBOH

and his soon-to-be best pal Kestrel, who, as a Russian man, has to wear the red goggles. Despite their chromatic differences, the two eventually become the best of friends, crow barring doors open together, planting C-4 charges for simultaneous detonations, and marking and executing entire rooms of people at once. Gone, as far as the Yastreb Complex level tells, are the vaguely erotic acrobatic moves of *Chaos Theory* (the phrase "use me as man-rope you mucky cow" may never be heard again) and arriving are the well-phrased mechanics of *Conviction* we spoke about in our last preview, tuned for two players.

TAKES TWO

Yastreb Complex, then. Having C-4ed a bit of wall, we slither into a loading bay area shrouded in darkness. Our objective is to find and interrogate one Major Rebko, and my partner in this spy thriller is Patrick Redding, game director for *Conviction's* multiplayer game and in possession of the kinds of skills that only come of having demonstrated the game a thousand times. As in the single-player game, "marking and executing" is your most effective means of shovelling out death, and to illustrate Redding effortlessly marks three patrolling guards who immediately appear on my HUD as hovering arrows. In response I clamber up a pipe.



Yastreb Complex. Home to the devious Major Rebko.

"Yastreb Complex is built to be tackled by a duo"

THE STORY SO FAR... SPLINTER CELL MULTIPLAYER



**PANDORA
TOMORROW**
Introduced the Spies
vs Mercs multiplayer.

2004



CHAOS THEORY
Had Spies vs Mercs,
but added a frottage-
laden co-op mode.

2005



DOUBLE AGENT
Poorly received, but
moved the co-op
element further on.

2007



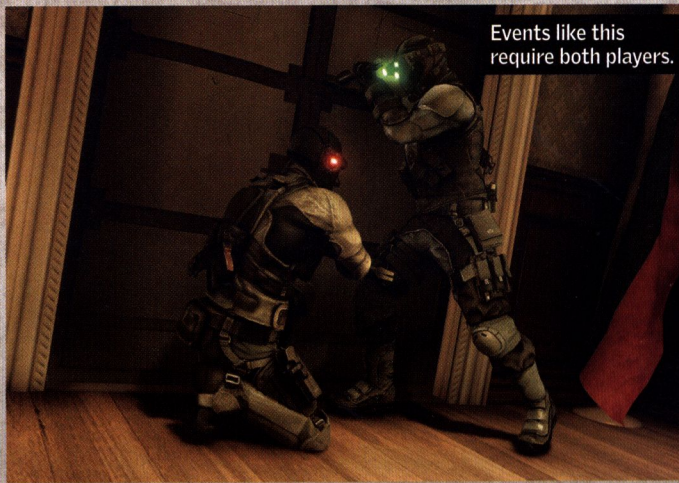
CONVICTION
Co-op has reached
maturity. Burn your
copy of Left 4 Dead.

2010

Archer's good, but Kestrel's
got dramatic timing down.



Events like this
require both players.



The spies send each other
rude text messages.



Desperate to look like I know what I'm
doing up in my lofty perch, I mark three
more men. All six are within our
collective field of vision, and should we
decide to, we may dispatch them with
clinical precision.

They've called this, simply enough,
'Dual Mark and Execute'. Executions
are rapid-fire, auto aimed fatal shots,
available only once you've engaged in
melee with an enemy (in this way, you're
restricted from using the powerful one-

hit-kill move against every guard you
encounter). In co-op, executions become
grandly choreographed, synchronous
events. When one of us triggers an
execution, time slows to allow the other
player to begin theirs, and the end result
is a room of six guards dropping to the
floor before they realise they're set upon.

Stylish, efficient, and visually elegant,
it's a spectacle that's rationed throughout
the level, requiring co-ordination and
(whaddya know) co-operation to pull off.
Lone executions are still an option,
naturally, as is the ability to execute
targets marked by another player. The
potentially intrusive time dilation only
comes into effect if both players have the
opportunity to simultaneously perform
an execution, otherwise it's carried out
on the crack of a whip.

OFFICE SPACE

Yastreb Complex, along with every inch
of the co-op campaign, is built from the
ground up to be tackled by a duo.

Multiple routes are nearly always
available, and enemies often appear in
formations that require they be taken out
simultaneously – either hawkishly
watching one another's backs or moving
in patterns that can be identified and
relayed to your fellow player. As we
approach our objective, myself and
Redding are made to rely on
communication and co-ordination.
The complex's office floor, replete
with scalable partition walls and
a crawl-space above the ceiling tiles,
tests our abilities to work in tandem.

Redding hoists himself up into the
maze of asbestos-riddled ceiling tiles
and switches to his sonar goggles to
highlight enemies below. I creep,
otherwise blind to what's around the
next corner, from cubicle to cubicle
while my teammate barks warnings and
instructions: "Wait at that corner", "The
guards are chatting, move now", "Quick,

NICE P.E.C.S. That's 'Persistent Elite Creation System'

Ubisoft Montreal love their buzzwords.
Along with "prepare, execute, vanish" and
"contextual bash points" they've now got
P.E.C.S.: the Persistent Elite Creation
System: XP that's earned with everything
you do in single and multiplayer.

Challenges are set across both modes,
requiring you to kill certain numbers of
people with certain weapons, or achieve
other unlikely feats. With the XP you earn
from doing so, you'll be able to get
upgrades, new equipment, and costumes
for Archer and Kestrel.

"It's almost a tacit nod to the idea
that Archer and Kestrel would have an
easier time of it if they could disguise
themselves," laughs Redding, game
director on *Conviction's* multiplayer.
"We're not doing crowd stealth, but we
thought it'd be really cool if, when
infiltrating a bunker under Moscow, you
could disguise yourself as a Moscow
utility worker. It makes it feel more like
a bank heist than the typical paramilitary
theme that you'd usually see."

vault over that photocopier all awesome-
like". Inside, though you'd never admit it,
you feel that maybe this is how real spies
talk to one another. On some childish
level, *Conviction's* co-op is the authentic
espionage experience.

When it all goes tits up though, and
we're both unable to carry out our
swanky execution moves, Redding starts
firing silenced shots through the ceiling
tiles, a mysterious deadly hail falling on
the unwitting guardians of the office.
Taking aim at the light fittings, I plunge
the room into darkness and turn the tide
of battle back in favour of the men with
the sonar-goggles. This is when the choke
hold happens, I'm grabbed from behind
and my perilous incompetence is flagged
up on Redding's screen. It's the
Splinter Cell equivalent of being
Smokered in *Left 4 Dead*, or

Less subtle weapons, like
shotguns, are available.



IT TAKES PRECISELY THIS MANY PEOPLE TO TANGOA rundown of what you can expect to see when you take *Conviction* online...**ARCHER**

This is Archer, the American spy from Third Echelon. He's got green goggles, green being the colour of money and capitalism and greed. Maybe.

PIPES

Co-op this time is less about incredible aerial acrobatics, but you can still climb and hang from pipes to orchestrate daring ambushes.

GHOSTS

This is Archer's last-known position. See how the NPC investigates the area around it, and how it's about to get him shot in the head.

RUSKIES

The collaboration with the Russians is clue enough as to where the campaign will mostly take place, and where the search for the missing nukes will take you.

KESTREL

This is Kestrel, the Russian spy from Voron. We like him better as he's immediately seen to be some sort of filthy Commie underdog. His goggles are red, predictably enough.

incapacitated in *Modern Warfare*, and Redding's reaction – to circle around and twist the man's head off – cements the spirit of the co-operation in a manner familiar to you if you've played either of those games.

MANSLAPS

Interrogations appear in co-op too, and much like in the single-player, they employ "contextual bash points" in the environment, that is, you can pin an interrogatee's hand to a tree with a knife, or smush his face into a photocopier until both are shattered and covered in toner, depending on where you take him. Both players can have a go at hurting a man until he talks, with one doing the grabbing and shaking while the other keeps an eye out for reinforcements.

In its current form, however, the implementation feels odd. On the Yastreb Complex level, Major Rebko flops petulantly to the floor in between snippets of information in order to allow the other player an opportunity to "have a go". And the role of scouting during an interrogation is pointless, as backup never arrives until you've progressed by

completing the scene, if at all. An opportunity's been missed to have Archer and Kestrel combine their interrogation techniques to get answers, not in a horrendous Guantanamo Bay sort of way, but in a

Smackdown vs RAW-style dramatic fighting moves sort of way. Or, in keeping with the tone, a brutal and calculated Bauer-Almeida double-team sort of way.

Yastreb ends with me lugging Major Rebko to an eye and fingerprint scanner with my teammate providing cover. Gunmen stream onto the mezzanine outside Rebko's office, while Redding monkeys along balconies, popping up above the railing to grab enemies and throw them down to the floor below. Then there's a twist, tables are turned dramatically and we find ourselves in the most Mexican of stand-offs. We fade to black. The playthrough is over. Just 20 minutes of a five-hour co-operative campaign, outside of the Fisher-focused single-player adventure. The question is: who would ever want to play single-player after that?

But this is (very almost) 2010. Multiplayer without a *World at War*-

style Siege mode, or a *Left 4 Dead*-style Survival mode, would cause ladies to faint in the street, and men to start brawling and tumbling through shop windows. With this in mind, on top of a co-op campaign fledged to within an inch of its life, you'll find, astonishingly, Deniable Ops, a collection of maps playable in four different game types with either one or two players. It's also designed to be played over and over until our sun explodes,

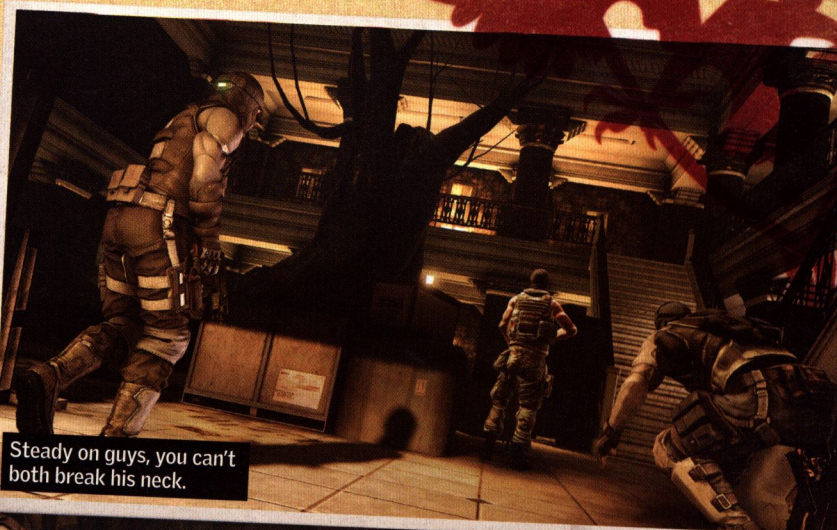
"Psst, Archer, your goggles have slipped down again."

FISHER, SAM

3 HIGH PRIORITY ECHELON EYES ONLY



Interrogations are still key to finishing some levels.



Steady on guys, you can't both break his neck.



'Dual Mark and Execute' in full effect.



SUBJECT
FISHER

NOTES
LAST KNOWN POSITION 02/11

with Ubisoft reckoning that Deniable Ops is where players will clock up most of their playtime.

A quick and humourless rundown of the four game types then. Hunter has you eliminating all enemies on a map as quickly as possible. Infiltration has you doing the same, but forces you to avoid detection. Last Stand is *Conviction's* nod to an increasingly popular game mode in which you must defeat increasingly well-equipped waves of enemies. And finally, Face-Off pits two spies against one another in a map populated by guards.

I'm shown the Lumber Mill map in Infiltration mode, this time in single-player. The crippling loneliness is made worse by the sense that you're now half as effective as you were before, and with that comes the burden of having to mark your own enemies and scout your own routes – it's a remarkably different experience. Lumber Mill is notable for all of its piles of lumber, great big trunks stacked in well-lit rows, forcing you to

make daring scoots down between bright wooden corridors and clamber between the rusted machinery.

TOP CLASS CO-OP

Unlike the story-led co-op mode, in which enemies' starting positions are dictated by level designers, Deniable Ops promises "emergent gameplay". That is, enemies will crop up in different places each time you play. This creates some interesting situations in the Face-Off games, especially when specifically combined with one of the single-player game's features: last known position.

Successfully breaking line-of-sight with the AI leaves behind a ghostly

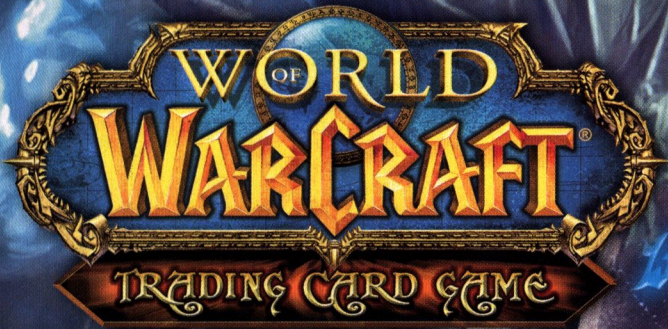
visage of yourself, indicating where the AI last copped eyes on you scuttling behind some crates. The AI will investigate that area, or simply fire blindly at it while you manoeuvre yourself to a more advantageous location. In Face-Off, using your last known position to lure guards towards your opponent is a viable tactic.

Of course, in this mode the game-ending executions are impossible to pull-off against human players. It's also, you might have noticed, the only non-co-operative part of *Conviction's* multiplayer game. Spies vs Mercs won't appear in *Conviction*, no doubt to some

consternation, as Ubisoft focus their efforts on the lengthy co-op campaign.

Clearly, *Conviction's* multiplayer won't be a side feature. For many it'll be the main attraction, a juggernaut of a co-op campaign bolstered by the inclusion of replayable Deniable Ops missions. *Splinter Cell* seems to have found its niche online, shedding the arguably discordant Spies vs Mercs (surely to cause some pained howls) in favour of the richer co-op experience.

The change in focus is paying off then, and it'll only take being grabbed by the neck and threatened with a gun to be convinced of it. **PCZ**



**STAND AGAINST
THE DARKNESS!**



INTRODUCING KEL'THUZAD
Master Hero!

ALL NEW CONTENTS
new mounts, new keywords,
dualclass cards and more!

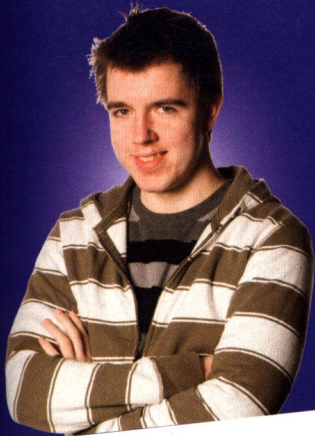
ALL NEW LOOT™
Tiny Mount, Spectral Kitten
and Tuskarr Kite!

Available 24 November 2009



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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

PRESIDENT POUFFE

THERE'S A TRICK to writing a column in a magazine as prestigious and long-standing as *PC ZONE*, and it's to assume that you're nothing less than astonishingly important. That's not hard for me, being a piece of the furniture at *PC ZONE*. I'm often used as a metaphorical chair, or referred to allegorically when discussing sideboards, such is the height of the esteem with which my four-year tenure at the magazine is held.

But would you trust a chair to manage a reviews section? That's like asking if a bookcase should be allowed to pilot a fighter jet, or if a pouffe could be president of the United States of America. Furniture can't bring you reviews of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* and *The Saboteur*. And it certainly won't deliver a verdict on *Dark Void*. Unless it's some sort of incredible magic chair. And even then, the magic chair would probably have far more important matters to attend to, such as press conferences.

What was my point again?

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
Deputy editor

MUST BUYS!



PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead Empire: Total War

PCZONE SWEARS...



68

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

The console smash is now on the PC. A year on, can *Star Wars* still move us?

THE PC ZONE BADGES



CLASSIC

(90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED

(75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP

(0-19%)
PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.

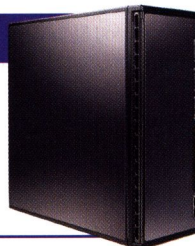


ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



ALSO REVIEWED

- 72 THE SABOTEUR**
Head back into World War II and blow up some Nazis. Will this semi-open world stealthier bring anything new to a tired setting?
- 74 DARK VOID**
Strap a rocket to your back and fly around to stop aliens invading the Bermuda Triangle. Elton John album not included.
- 76 LEAGUE OF LEGENDS**
Another *Defense of the Ancients* clone, or something mind-blowingly different?
- 78 DREAMKILLER**
Nothing to do with *Painkiller*.
- 79 NINJA BLADE**
- 80 JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR**
- 82 SHATTERED HORIZONS**
- 83 SERIOUS SAM HD**
- 84 GYROMANCER**
- 85 ZUMA DELUXE**
CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF MEATBALLS
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- 88 BUYER'S GUIDE**

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
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- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk



STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

Steve Hogarty's too short to be a Stormtrooper, too tall to be a Jawa

DEVELOPER LucasArts
PUBLISHER Aspyr
WEBSITE lucasarts.com/games/the-force-unleashed
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Third-person *Star Wars* romp in which the Force finally encounters a physics engine.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.4GHz Dual Core Processor, 2GB RAM, and a 256MB video memory with Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST **91%**

STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY **89%**

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED **62%**

FORCE UNLEASHED HAS the greatest introduction of any *Star Wars* game ever, which isn't hard when other nominations include things like "you wake up in space one day, not knowing where you are". It's a collage of all of the best bits of *Star Wars*, minus Hoth and the alien jazz band.

As such, you play as Darth Vader, stomping moodily through Kashyyyk and slaughtering Wookies in their droves. Over your shoulder Star Destroyers cut through the sky, raining down fire on the forests below. TIE Fighters scream overhead and Stormtroopers, buoyed by your presence on the battlefield, scuttle between cover and take potshots at the hairy menace. The Imperial March stomps along with you.

For an entire level you're the most powerful Force-wielder in the universe, grabbing Wookies with invisible hands and hurling them hundreds of metres into the air, off rope bridges and over cliffs.

Some panicking enemies desperately grab hold of their hovering buddies as you lift them, clinging on as you spin and hurl the mass of hair and limbs in every direction. Euphoria physics magic – the same sort that powered *Grand Theft Auto IV* – creates some intelligent ragdoll animations. Enemies fight against the molesting Force and attempt to balance themselves when knocked, they even grab and hold on to the scenery, and one another, as you attempt to click and drag them into oblivion.

This is the physics tech action-focused *Star Wars* gamers have been waiting for, and LucasArts have layered it on as thick as they could manage. On Kashyyyk, a nudge from the HUD asks you to test out Vader's overpowered Force Push technique on a bridge of approaching Wookiee soldiers. The effect is astounding and unexpected, where *Jedi Knight* would fling a couple of hapless Wookies into the chasm below, *Force Unleashed* uproots most of the bridge, shattering its cover

TIE Fighters: available in any colour, as long as it's black.





SUDDENLY I C-3PO

Without even having to finish the entire game or even accomplish anything of note, you can, at any time, assume the form of dozens of different *Star Wars* characters. All you do is simply delve through a few menu screens and restart playing at the last checkpoint. Of these reskins, C-3PO is the most appallingly non-canonical. The main character's animations remain intact, thus allowing the gilded camp-bot to flounce around levels swinging a lightsaber around without a care in the world. Sadly R2-D2 is absent from the roster of playable characters.

**"This is the physics tech
action-focused *Star Wars*
gamers have been waiting for"**

Force Repulse looks like this,
except more polygon-y.

DARTH VADER

Widely seen as the coolest mofo in the galaxy, *Force Unleashed* opens with you controlling the Sith Lord as he carves his way through Wookiees. He appears throughout, but isn't voiced by James Earl Jones. For shame.

STARKILLER

Yes, your alias is Starkiller, a tag that really needs '1994' pegged on the end. Clearly Vader has the maturity of the average Xbox Live user. You're an extension of robo-Jedi's will, and will undoubtedly get double-crossed.

EMPEROR PALPATINE

Palpy-chops is a crucial character; part of a three-way power struggle between himself, yourself, and Darth Vader's self. Will it be a literal three-way? Or a metaphorical one? Only the closing levels of the game will tell.

RAHM KOTA

Your first meeting with Rahm Kota gives a hint that all isn't as it seems. The Jedi can look to the future, yours in particular, and tell you what you'll be doing on any day, as well as telegraphing plot twists and the impending doom of certain characters.

PROXY

Comedy sidekick Proxy is a walking holographic projector, capable of appearing as nearly every member of the cast. When he's not being somebody else he wisecracks. While droids can't love, they've developed sense of humour.

JUNO ECLIPSE

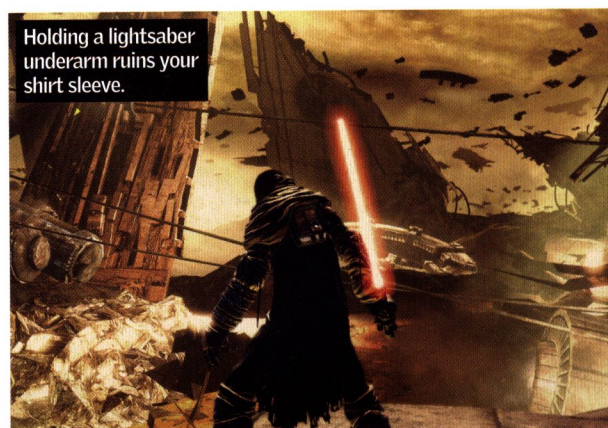
Sexy pilot lady who picks you up from and drops you off at the top and tail of levels, ensuring *Force Unleashed* can stick to a linear series of game events unhindered by personal choice or the caprice of the main character.

SHAAK TI

Sexy red lady has been described by Mace Windu as being "beautiful as a flower, yet deadly as a [something]". She battles you on top of a Sarlaac. It's not far into the game, so no prizes for guessing who gets killed.

MARIS BROOD

Sexy horn lady is an apprentice of Sexy Red Lady (left) and, as you can tell by looking at her, she's a bit of a bad 'un herself. She's got an awesome pair of lightsabers shaped a bit like nightsticks. We like things that are shaped like other things.



"Past the physics wizardry *Force Unleashed* feels as off-the-shelf as they come"

and supports into hundreds of shards, carrying the debris on a thunderous wave of furry destruction.

This is a PC port of the year-and-a-bit old console game, and outside of a few extra costumes this isn't much of an update. What drew console crowds back in the winter of 2008 was the physics, something which scarcely registers a bullet point on the back of the box in the highly sophisticated futuristic society in which we all now reside. You'll look past the technological crutch to the game's underlying flaws far more readily than you would've done before.

First among the shortcomings is your initial encounter with a Jedi outcast. Hammering the left mouse button to win a saber lock is trite, and any notion of clever physics flies out the window in a perfectly calculated arc when pressing E causes TIE Fighters to crash, somewhat unconvincingly, next to your opponent.

Quality takes another hit as soon as the fight's won, too, as the old, cruel trick of removing all of your abilities is played: you're placed in the shoes of Vader's secret apprentice, and what follows is an excruciating slog through a corridor-filled starship as the game struggles to emphasise exactly how rubbish you are compared to your master.

You'll improve though, as *Force Unleashed's* RPG elements allow you to upgrade your abilities as you progress. You'll also discover new Force powers, some of which become staples – gripping and throwing see some heavy usage throughout – and others being more useful in particular situations. Force Repulse sends out a shockwave that devastates nearby groups of enemies, while Force Lightning gets a lot of use during the game's puzzles, activating disused machinery and triggering explosive charges.

Sans magical powers, lightsaber combat is a basic click-to-swing affair until you unlock some of the later combo abilities. There's little actual timing involved, and mindlessly bashing the left mouse button will result in masterful swordplay. Mixing lightsabers and Force powers keeps things interesting: Force Choke an enemy and you can hurl your lightsaber at his torso for an instant kill. Or you can just stick to crushing people under physics-powered crates – there's a sense that the lethal glowsticks have been neglected in favour of all this new techno-whizz.

Boss fights are a bit of a mess too, odd events shot from fixed camera angles in enclosed arenas, which makes

targetting a pain in the arse. Spamming Force Lightning while avoiding attacks, or endlessly flinging the same bit of flotsam at your foe, will see you through most of these encounters. They typically end in a stylish, by-the-numbers, key-hammering QTE sequence, which simply repeats itself should you fail.

SMELLY PANTS

What you're left with then is a series of spectacularly presented levels, from Rancor pits to vast droid dumping grounds. *Force Unleashed* is at times a beautiful game, and the gentle pleasure of snatching up enemies and slamming them into trees, alongside the plot (which strives to be canon, a prequel of sorts to *A New Hope* – that's the first film, non-geeks) is enough to propel you through to the finale. Nice touches like the chance to discover and use different coloured lightsaber crystals, and to reskin your character as C-3PO, Darth Maul, Luke or any one of dozens of major and minor *Star Wars* characters, do just enough to keep you on the cusp of engagement too.

Past the inclusion of physics wizardry, though, *Force Unleashed* feels as off-the-shelf as they come. Oddly, it's a game that very gradually becomes worse as its ideas wither away and it leans with an

increasing dependence on repeating puzzles, bland levels and arse-ache boss battles. Every passing moment drops another grain of disappointment and sadness, like watching an elderly relative slide towards a stinking and undignified end. "Grandad," you might say, "your opening level with Darth Vader was ace, but it's a shame you shit your trousers so often that we don't like coming round any more." **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Very pretty
SOUND Vwums are in order
MULTIPLAYER No, none at all

- ✓ Throwing things is fun
- ✓ Picking people up is fun
- ✓ Some levels look amazing
- ✗ Repetitive
- ✗ Shonky combat
- ✗ One-trick physics-pony

62

The Drone Wars

Unlocked! Press
etails.

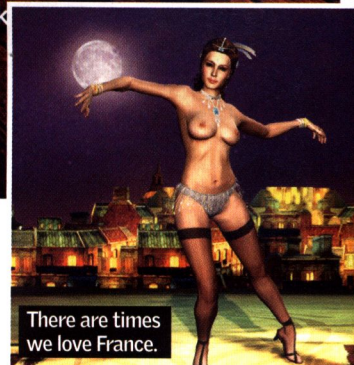
Finish off Doppelsieg
Goons 1/6



A typical night in a Belfast pub. Except for the Nazis.

Strong Punch <F>

Quick



There are times
we love France.

THE SABOTEUR

Be gorah, David Brown is sticking it to the Nazis

DEVELOPER Pandemic
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE pandemicstudios.
com/thesaboteur
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

THERE COMES A point when playing *The Saboteur* that two things really strike you, both to do with how the game is stitched together. The first thing is that you're gradually getting to like the rough-and-ready Irishman, Sean Devlin, who, I'm assured, has a bewildering array of accents that don't correspond to one particular place in the Emerald Isle. He even sounds Scottish at various points, according to the Irish lad who happens to sit next to me at Zone Towers.

Sean's a rogue, but a likeable one, as I said. He also has the knack of coming out with proper Irish insults and rude words (again, so I'm assured) – like 'knobjockey', for example. He's all set on getting even with the evil Teutonic übermensch that killed his friend and sent him tumbling into occupied Paris during the darkest days of World War II.

Luckily, he's given the opportunity to get his wish with the intervention of La Resistance, who amazingly aren't the

incompetent bumbler you might have seen in *'Allo 'Allo*. It's all good Boys' Own stuff, with evil Nazis, subterfuge and explosions, along with *Mafia*-style old-timer cars to charge around in.

This is where the second thing strikes you: the story is hampered by the fact there's a sub-GTA game attached to it. It's actually annoying when you finish a cut-scene and have to venture back into the actual game part of the game.

PASS THE PLASTIQUE

This part, the meat of *The Saboteur*, involves sabotaging the Nazi's plans by destroying Zeppelins or just blowing up fuel dumps. By successfully avoiding the

attentions of the Nazi guards and foiling their schemes, you edge closer to the evil Nazi guy who is your ultimate goal. And, as an afterthought, help the people of Paris fight back against their Germanic oppressors.

You can tell how successful you've been by how many areas of the city are depicted in colour. If they're grey, the people are despondent, but if they are all colourful, the people there are taking hope from your actions.

There are loads of nice little touches around the place, like the hardest difficulty being called "Feckin' Hard", that raise a smile, but the actual act of playing *The Saboteur* isn't that pleasant. It feels

AT A GLANCE...

Politically incorrect plot about an Irishman planting bombs in occupied territory wraps around a generic semi-open world third-person affair.

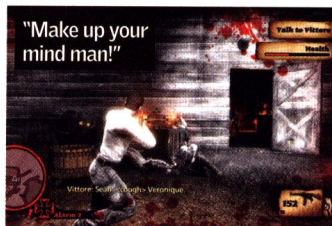
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.4GHz dual core processor, 2GB RAM, 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0.

HOW IT STACKS

MAFIA 92%

VELVET ASSASSIN 72%

THE SABOTEUR 64%



MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Why Sean isn't a knobjockey

He's abrasive and rude, drinks a lot of whiskey and feels sorry for himself because his buddy got the back of his blown to smithereens by a nasty Teuton, but Sean Devlin is still a loveable old rogue who lives in a 'house of ill repute' in the middle of Paris, surrounded by buxom wenches.

He's always on hand with a witty remark, even if one of said remarks is "Dear wankers, sorry for fucking up your car. Send the bill to me. Arse". Which, as we all know, is the politest way a drunken Irishman can say sorry for wrecking somebody else's property.



Sean Devlin: an Irishman and a dab hand with explosives.

Racing drivers ignored petrol rationing.

Your eye shadow needs work.

clumsy and awkward compared to other efforts and, as you might have suspected, feels completely console in its approach. Every recent cliché in the book is used in *The Saboteur*, from buying things off the black market to deliberately obtuse game mechanics that just don't make sense in the immediate context – like having to actively steal a car to get to the race track, despite you being the lead driver for one of the teams involved. Am I the only person this seems strange to?

PANDEMIC RIP

There are lots of other clumsy little things that jangle the nerves, like being told Nazis are trained to investigate explosions and the sound of gunfire. As opposed to Nazis that blissfully ignore these things? Nazis are also suspicious of people planting explosives, which came as a great surprise to us. Who'd have thought it, eh?

Combat feels clunky and unsatisfying too, both in terms of hand-to-hand combat and fighting of the ranged variety. In fact, there isn't any aspect of the actual gameplay that feels smooth and natural.

Being as this is Pandemic's last game, it's a shame they haven't gone out with a bang, but it's really just down to not providing a smooth game experience. There's nothing inherently wrong with all of the game elements they've included, nor is it really that annoying to be treated like a child and told that Nazis find their bases exploding suspicious.

If she has to ask, you're doing it wrong.

Skylar: Are you chatting me up?

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Average
SOUND Strange accents, well delivered
MULTIPLAYER Not at all

- ✓ Good storyline
- ✓ Driving is decent
- ✓ Likeable main character
- ✗ Unlikeable main game
- ✗ Patronising advice

64

Sabotaged



DARK VOID

David Brown's got a dark void between his ears

DEVELOPER Airtight Games
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE darkvoidgame.com
ETA 15 January
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Yet another disappointing and wretchedly generic third-person action game, which has an annoying gimmick that only just works.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Intel 2.4GHz or AMD 2.0GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 7900 or Radeon HD 3850 series graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

DARK SECTOR 58%

DARK VOID 53%

DAMNATION 50%

GROAN, GROAN, GROAN to the high heavens. Is this truly all we have to look forward to for the next 10 billion years? Do we just have to watch some guy who looks pretty much the same in every single game trudging about scenery rendered in *Unreal Tournament 3*'s engine? Are developers deliberately failing to come up with anything new whatsoever to shape their games? And no, I don't just mean "make the same game and then stick some bloody gimmick into it so people think it's different to the last one."

That's exactly what's happened here, yet again. *Dark Void*, a game that had the potential to be something special if it hadn't been crushed underneath the hammer of unoriginality. Just because you've got a jet pack in the game doesn't mean it's going to hide the fact I might as well be playing *Dark Sector*, *Damnation*, or *Terminator: Salvation* or... well, you get the picture. It doesn't help that said jet pack sections are very difficult to control

effectively using the traditional mouse and keyboard setup. It's better with a pad, but it's still pretty weak and imprecise. I'll concede that when it does work it feels pretty cool, but it's so fiddly, you always feel that this facade could shatter in the blink of an eye.

GOOD STUFF

The best thing about the game is the plot and setting. While the idea of "humans stranded in rebellious bondage seek saviour to break free of chains" isn't an original one, the whole tie-in with the Bermuda Triangle is interesting. You feel more could have been made of this – why didn't they really play on this aspect and have more than just a cameo from a scientist based on Nikola Tesla? There's all sorts of missing celebrities they could have had, but enough of that. I could go on for a long time about it.

So yeah, the setting is good and you just wish the game could back it up, as is usually



"Hello. We'll be your generic baddies for this game."



the case with these over-the-shoulder titles we've been seeing so much of.

There's a cover system, which is of little surprise to anyone, and there's also a 'vertical cover system', which just involves flipping the viewpoint to face up a surface, and your character performing prescribed moves by pressing the 'C' key. It can serve up some pleasant visual moments, but other than that it's just an unnecessary gimmick.

THE REST

Speaking of visuals, the *UT3* engine is getting very, very tired. Time was when the detail wowed us, but now it doesn't even inspire hatred, such its overuse and bland, washed-out nature, especially with the ever-present distance fog blighting the land. To add to the uninspiring visuals, the crux of the game – shooting Geth-like creatures with big slugs controlling them – is vapid and tedious too. Every enemy seems to take about 40 bullets to the face before they go down in time-

"There must be something good about this game, though. There has to be"



honoured "stretch-the-gameplay-out-artificially" tradition until you upgrade your weapons using the obligatory upgrade system that every game has to have now. You don't actually get to make many upgrades, as the points you collect to enable them take ages to accumulate.

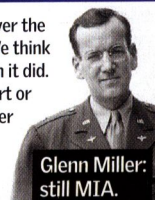
There must be something good about this game, though. There has to be. As I mentioned, there's the "when it works" air combat. Once you get used to it, it can feel fluid and exciting, but the line between success and failure is much too fine. If you're using the mouse and keys, the temptation is always to use the WASD keys to move around – but when

WHISPERS OF MISERS

Missing persons that should have turned up in *Dark Void*

All sorts of people have gone missing in mysterious circumstances over the years. Despite being in this game, Nikola Tesla wasn't one of them. We think Airtight could have played this element of the game up far more than it did.

Imagine the possibilities of discovering Lord Lucan, Amelia Earhart or Glenn Miller eking out an existence in the Void. Imagine blowing Miller away with a laser for composing all the irritating music he came up. "That's for *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, you swine!" you could imagine yourself screaming at the screen, possibly.



flying, you need to use the mouse, which is criminally sluggish and imprecise – the very opposite to what it should be. So, definitely use a gamepad, as it's clear the mouse support was added as a very last-minute afterthought. If you can use one, or if you can force yourself not to press A or D to strafe left and right, then it'll be good fun soaring around in the clouds. Just don't expect to be too accurate with your gunfire and you'll be fine.

Dark Void is a criminal waste of time and energy, as standard and generic a game as you could hope to find, with a couple of little things that raise it out of the meat grinder and back into the land of the living. The flying side of things is reasonable but not worth all the hype, as the main game is a total bore and the plot is wasted on the rest of the package. That about sums it up. **PCZ**

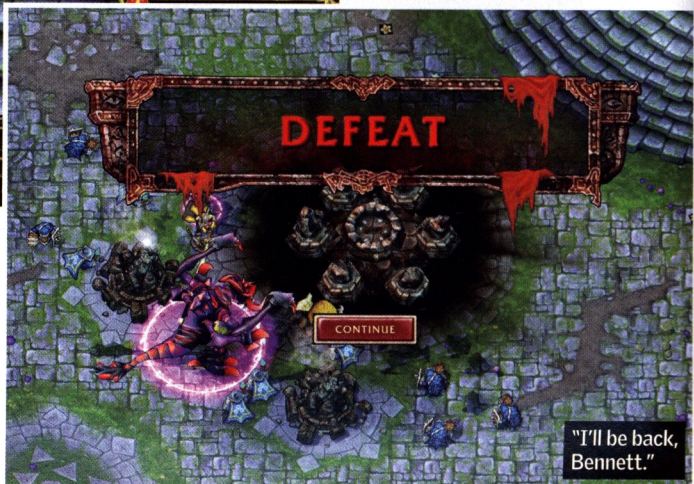
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Distinctly average
SOUND Nothing of note
MULTIPLAYER None at all

- ✓ Plot and universe has potential
- ✓ Flying works...
- ✗ ...only partially
- ✗ Painfully generic
- ✗ Same old *UT3* engine visuals

53
Black Hole of Originality

Looks aren't everything.



LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

Stuart Renton becomes a legend

DEVELOPER Riot Games
PUBLISHER GOA
WEBSITE lol-europe.com
ETA Early 2010
PRICE £24.99

AT A GLANCE...

Defence of the Ancients gets a fantasy makeover in this sword and sorcery real-time strategy game.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card. Internet connection required.

| HOW IT STACKS | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE | 86% |
| LEAGUE OF LEGENDS | 72% |
| DEMIGOD | 68% |

WHEN I WAS asked to team up with a bunch of mindless automatons in an attempt to take over the world, I thought I'd got a job at Starbucks. Turns out I'd been asked to review the latest real-time fantasy strategy game on the block, *League of Legends*.

The idea isn't a new one: your team – including a heroic champion – battles across a fantasy map in an attempt to destroy an enemy's base, which, every few seconds, churns out a horde of minions. It's their thankless task to trundle across the world to face inevitable doom, as they try to destroy their opponent's defensive towers.

Your champion gains unique abilities as it levels up throughout each game. Winning games earns you Influence Points which allows you to unlock more powerful champions and to find spells and runes. These give your heroes a distinct advantage, but this is balanced by restricting the number of each you can take into battle. While the game is

very easy to play, there are so many combinations of powers and abilities, it's difficult to master.

STRATEGIC ABUSE

Being an online title, it stands to reason that the worst thing about this game is the player base, which is among the rudest and most intolerant I've ever encountered. The amount of abuse I suffered in my first few games for not "pulling my weight" was alarming – not a positive aspect for a game that relies so heavily on an influx of new players to sustain it.

Accordingly, it's hard to find a random game for while the server lists are full, most are password-protected (presumably to avoid the horde of foul mouthed gamers, eager to insult their own teammates).

At its heart, this is *Defence of the Ancients* with a graphics overhaul and a dry sense of humour. If you liked the original, and can tolerate the other online players, then there's plenty here

to lure you in. At least until *StarCraft II* comes along. If not, the limited game play options might not be enough for many gamers. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Bright, colourful, dated
SOUND Does the job
MULTIPLAYER Of course

- ✓ Huge list of Champions
- ✓ Diverse and interesting powers
- ✓ It's *Defence of the Ancients*
- ✗ Champion imbalance
- ✗ Graphically dated

72

Not a legend

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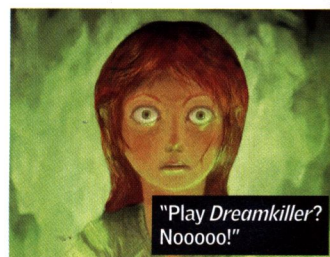
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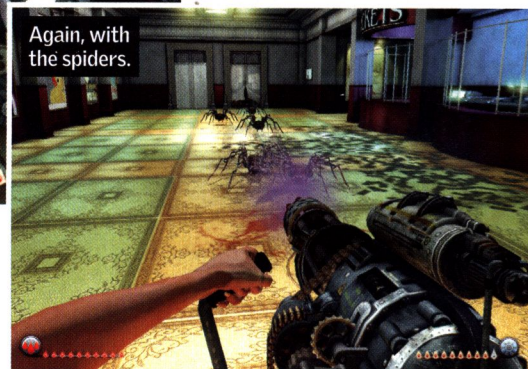
Move over *Crysis*, your time is up.



You kill spiders a lot.



"Play *Dreamkiller*? Nooooo!"



Again, with the spiders.

DREAMKILLER

David Brown doesn't sleep, he reviews

DEVELOPER Mindware Studios
PUBLISHER Aspyr
WEBSITE dreamkillergame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £27.99

AT A GLANCE...

Fiercely unattractive and repetitive blaster experience with little to nothing to recommend it to anyone but the criminally insane.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2.4GHz dual core processor, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

PAINKILLER 83%

DREAMKILLER 31%

PAINKILLER: RESURRECTION 19%

THE OBVIOUS THING to say is that the game is more of a nightmare than a dream and, yes, it'd be completely accurate to say so. The only positive thing I can find to say about *Dreamkiller* is that it's better than *Painkiller: Resurrection* (PCZ 215, 19%). But as you can see by the score we gave that one, it's not exactly praise that we're showering on *Dreamkiller*. Cold piss, maybe.

This shooter is all about a tattooed lady who can enter your mind and conquer your greatest fears for you, be they spiders or whatever.

The first level is all about spiders and sets the scene perfectly. Drab scenery, painful frame rates if you try to put the texture quality up to High on less-than-wonderful machines, plus repetitive action that has to be experienced to be believed. Actually, it's best you don't

ever experience it, to be honest. It's really not fun at all.

The idea is a decent one and offers a lot of scope for interesting scenarios and levels, which is the most saddening thing about the *Dreamkiller*.

There's been some attempt to create something special here, but it's just such a chore to grind through the game, you'll never see whether the latter levels offer wondrous sights. They'd probably all look ghastly anyway, due to the lack of detail in the environments and textures. But it doesn't matter how much thought has been put into level design when the gameplay itself is so monotonous.

JUST BAD

For instance, there's one bit on the second level, where you find yourself in a car park. Naturally, enemies spawn everywhere and you back off and let them rush headlong at you. I ended up just running around in a big circle for ages while the baddies just spawned inexorably. Then some big spiders appeared. I killed them and then I moved to the next room, where another load of creatures spawned and the cycle was effectively repeated.

If that sounds like your idea of fun and you like the fact you can only carry

one weapon at a time, barring your rubbish flamethrower-hands ability, then *Dreamkiller* is just the ticket.

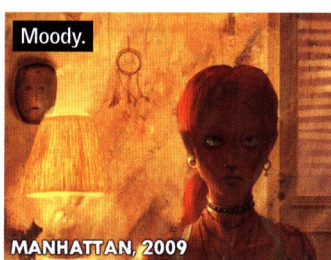
For people who value things like excitement, variety, visuals, tension and just plain old good quality gaming, this would be about as much fun as stuffing a funnel into your rectum and pouring boiling hot tar into it. In fact, that actually sounds like it could be more fun than playing this game. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Woeful
SOUND Nothing of note
MULTIPLAYER Unfortunately

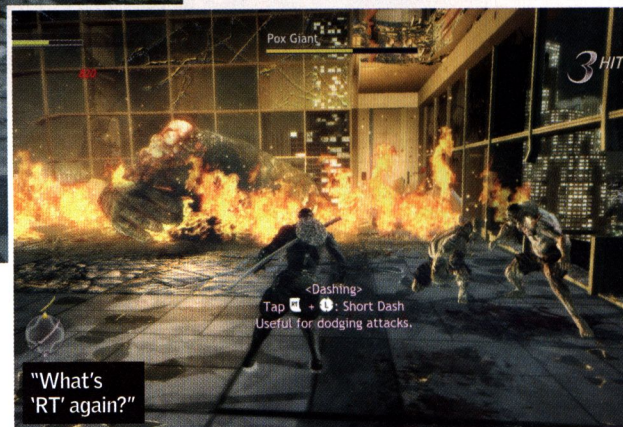
- ✓ Better than *Painkiller: Resurrection*
- ✗ ...but only just
- ✗ Bad design
- ✗ Bad graphics
- ✗ Bad everything

31
 Oneirophobics unite



Moody.

MANHATTAN, 2009



NINJA BLADE

David Brown is down on a QTE tip

DEVELOPER FromSoftware
PUBLISHER ND Games
WEBSITE ninja-blade.com/en
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

Completely, utterly and devastatingly console-centric, despite its porting to PC. This mindless hack 'n' slash effort drains the soul from your body.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 3.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

DARK SECTOR 58%

NINJA BLADE 29%

X-BLADES 19%

URGH, WHAT A slog. There's just no joy at all to be had from playing this game, even though you've got all sorts of whizz-bang action and swords chopping at enemies with wanton abandon. But there's no soul there, none at all.

Ninja Blade is as corporate a game as you're likely to ever play, with virtually nothing to identify it from the hundreds of other games that block up the shelves with their inane drudgery. And, on top of all of this, it's riddled, nay, infested with quick time events, those three dreaded words that plague all right-minded individuals.

You play a character called Ken Ogawa, who likes to wear ninja clothes and do ninja things. The question of why global organisations are recruiting ninjas to battle 'infected' creatures across the globe is left unanswered. (Argh, even the choice of bad guy is so thoughtless, it makes me angry just to write it.) Anyway, as our Ken chops up shambling entities, upgrades his weapons and presses Space when prompted to by the game, he has to contend with that most hideous of things: the shoddy console port effect. Yes, when you save the game it says, "Do not turn off your console". Would it

have been too much trouble to change that word to "machine"? Really?

EXPORT EPIC FAIL

All the controls are marked in Xbox control pad symbols, so you have no idea what key you're meant to be pressing. Yes, I could have plugged in a pad, but what if I didn't have one or mine broke? So I had to guess which keys did what, because there's no way the game's going to actually make it easy for me. Press RT and move the left stick to wall run. Right, I know WSAD is the left stick, so what's RT? Quick check of the controls reveals nothing, so I'll just spend five minutes pressing all the keys and falling off a ledge to find out which one it is. Ah-ha! CTRL! At last, you little rascal.

As you can see, I hated playing this game. The unendurable boss battles, the combat, the ridiculous American



accents for the clearly non-American characters, the astonishing number of QTEs and, finally, the lack of anything approaching an original idea contrives to make this one of the most ghastly games I've had the misfortune to play. Refuse to accept a game with such little creative effort put into it and vote with your wallets. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Generic
SOUND Generic
MULTIPLAYER If there was, it'd be generic

- ✓ It didn't crash once
- ✓ It runs well enough
- ✗ No soul
- ✗ No fun
- ✗ No excitement
- ✗ No point

29
 Shite



JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR: THE GAME

Steve Hogarty is slapped in the face by a 3D bush

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE avatargame.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Game of the film is a commercially charged vehicle for licensing deals and 3D whizzbang tech.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3.2GHz Pentium 4 or 2.66GHz Athlon
64 X2 3800+, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista/7), 256MB RADEON 1650 or GeForce 200 series graphics card, with Shader Model 3.0 or higher. 3D requires a 120hz monitor and goggles.

HOW IT STACKS

CRYSIS 92%

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION 66%

AVATAR 58%

EVERY NOW AND then a movie tie-in game comes along that bucks the trend of movie tie-in games that buck the other trend of movie tie-in games being rubbish.

James Cameron's *Avatar* tumbles through this Mandelbrot of trend-buckage and emerges, sadly, on the rubbish side. It's a technological marvel, certainly, having – like the movie – been built from the ground up to be a fully popping-out-of-the-screen-and-into-your-face 3D experience, but beyond the illusion of depth the game itself is flatter than a pug's face.

You're one of the soldier men, shipped out to the mystical world of Pandora, a place in which the flora and fauna attempt to tear you limb from limb at every turn. Living on this planet is the equally mystical Na'vi tribe, a bunch of blue-skinned, cat-faced ladies and gents who tower over the invading human forces.

They're naturally opposed to the imposition, and so the conflict calls for an over-the-shoulder, third-person action-adventure across several different zones on Pandora. You can move freely from place to place,

collecting side missions and discovering cell samples, but primarily you'll be driving the plot onwards along the main quest line.

Not far into *Avatar*, you'll choose whether to ally with the Na'vi by permanently assuming your alien form (your consciousness can be transferred into the body of a Na'vi, which isn't very well explained, particularly if you've not yet seen the film) or having it speared to bits, never to be seen again. Whichever route you take, most of the same problems will find you.

DIRE SPIN-OFF

Foremost is that combat simply isn't fun on any level. Enemies move in strange, unpredictable patterns, not reacting to your attacks in any way. They don't take cover or employ tactics, instead opting to run at you repeatedly before doubling back on themselves and retreating to a safe distance.

No matter which path you choose you'll have to contend with either natural or mechanical transports, the horrendous handling of which defies belief. As a marine you can wield a near-useless flamethrower, and as a Na'vi

you're left to defend yourself with rudimentary tribal nonsense mixed with some useless acrobatics.

Playing *Avatar* is a hollow experience compounded by a two-dimensional, linear string of objectives delivered to you by a soulless cast of rigid actors. This is only worth playing in 3D, so that you can flick them in their stupid floating faces. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lush, green, 3D
SOUND Nothing audibly special
MULTIPLAYER Yes

- ✓ 3D magic is incroyable
- ✓ Two campaigns in one
- ✗ Weapons are dull
- ✗ Combat is a chore
- ✗ Vehicles are awful

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Avatarred and feathered

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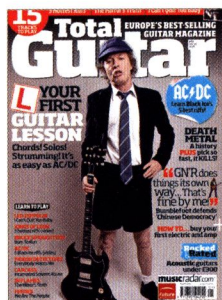
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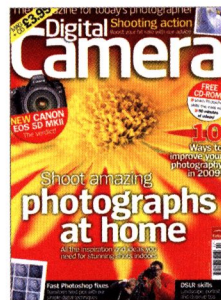
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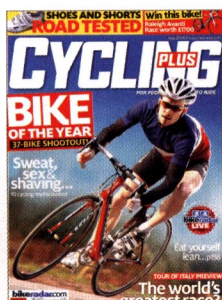
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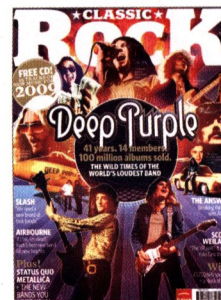
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Inspired by *Moonraker*, perhaps?



SHATTERED HORIZON

Adam Glick says he's weightless, but that's only because the scales broke

DEVELOPER Futuremark Games Studio
PUBLISHER Futuremark Games Studio
WEBSITE shatteredhorizon.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

AT A GLANCE...

Make like an violent astronaut and fly around in zero-G while being shot at by a small amount of enemy players.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 Intel Core 2 Duo E6600 or AMD Athlon64 X2 5600+, 2GB RAM, 256MB GeForce 8800GT or Radeon HD 3870 with DirectX 10.

HOW IT STACKS

DESCENT 3 **87%**

BATTLEFIELD HEROES **71%**

SHATTERED HORIZON **66%**

REGARDLESS OF ANY problems that might afflict *Shattered Horizon*, there's one thing that'll always remain cool: the sight of dead bodies tumbling about in the empty void. It's less cool when it's your own, but it's still funky to see it spinning off into space.

Sadly, you'll be seeing this a lot if you do decide to purchase *Horizon*, as it's crushingly unforgiving to new players. I'm not that good at FPS games, but I think I'm a little bit better than the Kill/Death Ratio of 0.28 suggests.

This is a major issue because so few people are actually playing the game, a fact made more stark by the way the server list actually lies about how many people are on certain servers, if you can believe that. Trying to join a game where 20 people are playing leads to a match with only four. Likewise, an alleged five-man server was completely empty. If there were more players, the K/D ratio would undoubtedly be higher, but newbies are less likely to be able to ease themselves into things when the only

people on the server are a bunch of crazed veterans.

There's a plot in here somewhere about the moon exploding and creating a bunch of omni-directional deathmatch arenas, but it's totally irrelevant. All you really need to know is that you're an astronaut-of-sorts and you get to fly about capturing or defending flags.

If you ever played *Descent*, you'll be familiar with the disorientating nature of the 360° movement. You can rotate on the Z-axis while flying about and it's very easy to get confused as to where you're going or, indeed, being shot from. It's definitely a game where camping works, but only to an extent.

SNEAK-A-NAUTS

Thankfully, most places people hide on or near can be accessed in a myriad number of ways, due to the 360° nature of movement. This is both a blessing and a curse, because it means you can't take solace in a hiding place for a little while, because there's always the chance some git will just boost around behind you and take you out.

This makes the experience incredibly quick when the action's kicking in and unbearably slow-paced when it's not.

Look out! Sphere ahead!



NASA wouldn't approve.



That view will never get dull.



PCZONE

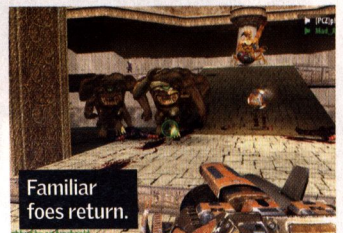
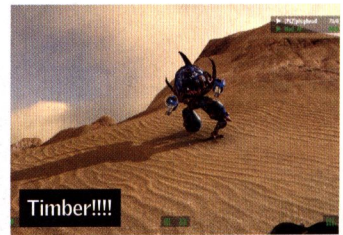
GRAPHICS Pretty
SOUND Zappy
MULTIPLAYER Only way to play

- ✓ Visually interesting
- ✓ Original concept
- ✗ Not enough current players
- ✗ Not easy to get into
- ✗ Can get dizzy and disorientated easily

66

Rotating slowly

Not the type of birds we like at Zone Towers.



SERIOUS SAM HD

David Brown is riding the gun again

DEVELOPER Croteam
PUBLISHER Developer Digital
WEBSITE serioussam.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99



AT A GLANCE...

The grunting T-shirted lunatic is back after a long hiatus, with a new engine but the exact same game as the first time round.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0.

HOW IT STACKS

SERIOUS SAM HD 67%

DREAMKILLER 29%

PAINKILLER: RESURRECTION 19%

HAS IT REALLY been eight years since we first locked, loaded and lobbed bullets around an alternate version of ancient Egypt with that most stern-browed of game heroes, Serious Sam? Ah, there was *Serious Sam 2* a few years ago, but that didn't have the impact as the original, despite being more ambitious.

Well, it was ambitious only in a geographical sense, because the actual gameplay was exactly the same. And so it is in *Serious Sam HD*, where Croteam have spent a long time spitting on and vigorously polishing their old game, so much so that they created a new engine.

With as much imagination as went into the decision to just make the game identical to the original in virtually every way, the new engine has been dubbed the Serious Engine 3.0. It does indeed look pretty good. For some reason, it doesn't seem as radically beautiful as some were saying it was going to be, but it's pretty decent, considering the size and scope of the levels and the number of enemies zipping about the place. Of course, it's not *Crysis*, but, just like with the original, sheer beauty has been sacrificed for playability.

But, for £17.99 or so, is just this graphical boost worth it when you could just play the original and get the exact same gaming experience? Probably not, sadly. It's a little overpriced (at least on *Steam*, as other places do the game cheaper) for what it is – an old game given a new lick of paint – and even with the addition of Achievements and all the bonuses being on *Steam* brings with it, it still essentially boils down to being an expensive nostalgic novelty. But shave £10 off the price and we'd be laughing.

KEEP ON SHOOTIN'

Co-op is still great fun though and the game remains very challenging as you ramp up the difficulty. You'll really need a microphone to get the most out of it, because the text chat "facility" leaves nearly everything to be desired.

Anyway, as far as introducing new players to the old school, constant

blasting style of shooter that *Serious Sam* is perhaps the embodiment of, it's the best place to start out. It looks good and still has that all important fun factor present to make playing it a blast.

But for older players, veterans of the series, it might not be worth spending nearly £20, when there are so many other important games either out or on the horizon. **PCZ**



PCZONE

GRAPHICS Crisp and smooth
SOUND Same as before
MULTIPLAYER Co-op and deathmatch

- ✓ Looks good
- ✓ Co-op still great as every
- ✗ Not enough is new
- ✗ Too expensive considering

67
Serious problems



GYROMANCER

David Brown will be seeing gems in his sleep tonight

DEVELOPER PopCap
PUBLISHER Square Enix
WEBSITE dlgames.square-enix.com/gyromancer
ETA Out now
PRICE £10.99

SOMEWHERE IN THE dark halls of PopCap's underground lair, where the purest gaming drugs are constantly refined to keep us under control, the question was asked: "Does the world really need another gem matching game?" The answer must surely have been "Yes! Give those salivating dogs the gems they so crave," and so *Gyromancer* was born, with a little help from collaborators Square Enix.

The storyline is utterly irrelevant, given it's just a vehicle to allow you to progress to the next gem battle. If you've played *Puzzle Quest* or any other game like that, you know exactly what's coming. Matching three or more gems in a row to get points is still the basic premise, but there's a lot more to it than that. Your character, a magician called Rivel, summons various beasts to do his

fighting for him and each creature has their own preferred gem colour. Matching gems of this hue charges up your creature's special abilities and, when a gem is highlighted, matching these ones causes damage to be inflicted on your enemy.

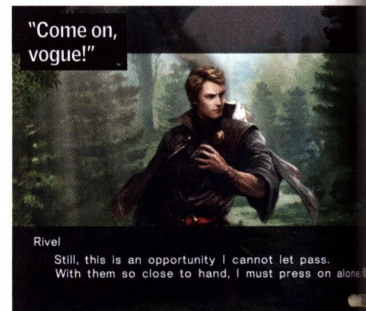
Likewise, the enemy has a preferred colour and when gems appear with skulls on them, you have to clear them before a timer runs down, otherwise damage is done to your beast.

CHARMLESS JEWELS

Gyromancer is actually more strategic than you might think it would be. While there are timers on the skull gems, they only tick down when you make a move, so you've got plenty of time to plan your strategy. Of course, even with this added tactical layer, it's still highly repetitive and suffers from all the same problems as its peers.

Also, *Gyromancer* doesn't feel like a PopCap game really, lacking the charm of their classic releases *Plants vs Zombies* and *Peggle*. Perhaps that's because it's made in partnership with Square Enix, whose influence seems to be far more pervasive.

So, while as a gem-matching puzzler it's solid and fun, it doesn't really



capture the imagination or provide the lasting impetus to have just one more game that *Peggle* and *Zuma's Revenge* do. For those who can't get enough of playing with gems, though, there's both nothing you won't have seen before, and everything that you'll be wanting to see again.

This is one for gem completionists, but it won't be raising any bars or breaking any moulds. **PC7**

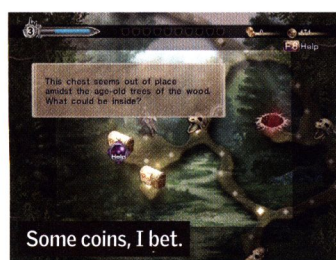
AT A GLANCE...

Another match-the-gems game with a role-playing beards-and-beasts storyline in the background.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a DirectX 9 compatible video card.

HOW IT STACKS

| | |
|---|-----|
| PUZZLE QUEST: CHALLENGE OF THE WARLORDS | 86% |
| PUZZLE QUEST: GALACTRIX | 71% |
| GYROMANCER | 69% |



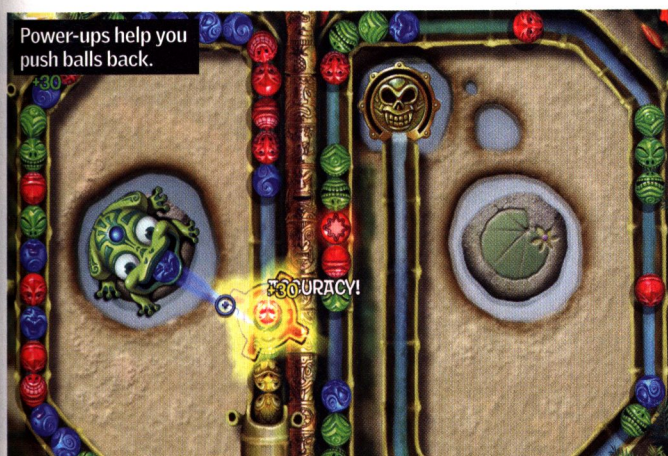
Some coins, I bet.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Uninspiring
SOUND Uninspiring
MULTIPLAYER A lonely gem

- ✓ Gem-my goodness
- ✓ Good strategic gameplay
- ✗ Unoriginal
- ✗ Lacks PopCap charm
- ✗ Repetitive gameplay

69
 Flawed gem



ZUMA'S REVENGE

Balls slapping together all day long



DEVELOPER PopCap
PUBLISHER PopCap
WEBSITE popcap.com/games/zumasrevenge
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
700MHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 16MB graphics card.



I T DOESN'T SEEM to be possible for PopCap to release a bad game. Sure, they've had a few partial misses in the past, but since *Peggle* exploded, they've just nailed that treble 20 each time. *Zuma's Revenge* is just the next game off their conveyor belt of fiendishly addictive, quality casual titles. It's also safe to say, though, that it doesn't have that all-encompassing joy factor of *Peggle* delivered, as, surprisingly, it's a little bit user-unfriendly.

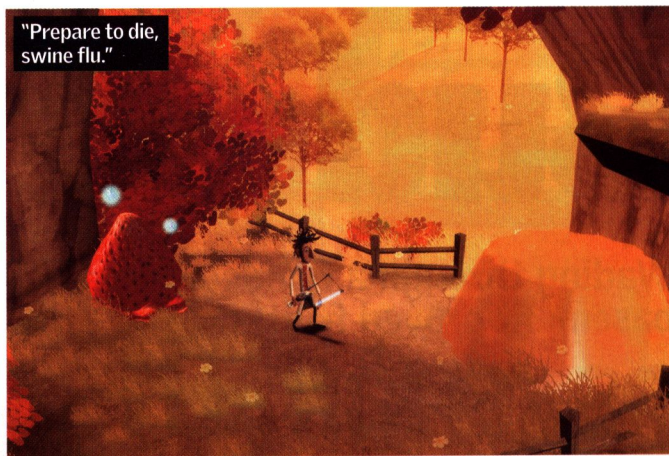
The premise is that your hero, a frog, is shipwrecked on a monster-infected Hawaii-like island and, in his attempts to explore his surroundings, has to do battle with the denizens of the jungle. There are lots of mentions of the word Tiki, too, which is always nice.

His battles take the form of long ribbons of coloured balls that snake along a track towards a gaping maw of death. You have to stop said balls disappearing into the demonic gullet by

firing additional spheres into the snake. It's a twist on the match-3 games like *Bejewelled*, just not on a grid. The key is to make sure you don't fire too many in at once, as each addition extends the line by one, inching it ever closer to destruction. Chain matches together for big points and huge reductions in the length of the snake.

Zuma's Revenge is addictive and it's fun, but it is more frustrating and rage-inducing than other PopCap efforts of late. *Plants vs Zombies* never once made you feel like you were never going to finish a level, but *Zuma's Revenge* has a lives and a checkpoint system, making you replay a few difficult levels after a couple of failures. It also takes an age to load the game on lesser systems. Yet overall, it's a great little game though and certainly a worthy successor to the original *Zuma*.

David Brown



CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF MEATBALLS

Endearing name, terrible game

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Shanghai
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE cloudyvideogame.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista/Windows 7), and a 64MB graphics card.



I DIDN'T KNOW this was a game based on a "mouth-watering motion picture" but as soon as it loads up, you get that vibe from it. The temptation is to lay into it savagely, but it would be unfair. It's a game for kids and one that you could play along with in the role of Steve the Monkey, as it has a local co-op mode.

Having said that, kids do deserve more than just a cute food-hoovering game. Also consider the fact that most kids will be hankering after titles in which you blow away bad guys with shotguns and grenades.

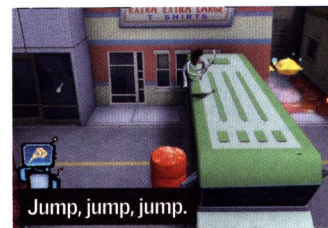
So, young kids would be a more accurate description of the audience, children who've yet to be tainted by the all-encompassing violence behemoth. In *Cloudy* they get the chance to be Flint, an inventor who has created a device that rains down foodstuffs on his town.

Of course, it goes wrong and he has to clean up the mess. It's your usual platform game dynamic going on, with the addition of a few puzzles here and there. Spraying honey on certain walls allows you to climb up and moving bits of chorizo onto conveniently placed Xs allows you to jump up onto the next ledge. That sort of thing.

The game's charming enough, despite having a wildly differing level of visual quality in certain sections. The lab, which acts as the main hub for missions and upgrades, looks swish, but menus are jagged and ugly. There's not much else to say really, it's just a generic licensed platform game for kids.

You could probably find something better if you looked hard enough, and £20 is a bit too much, but it'll keep sprogs busy over Christmas.

David Brown



Budget

Wading through a flooded bargain basement proved fruitful...

PSYCHONAUTS

PUBLISHER Majesco WEBSITE www.psychonauts.com PRICE \$9.99 (£6.00)

THE TEAM AT PC ZONE hold a special place for Tim Schafer. It's an altar, right next our places of devotion for Warren Spector and Maggie, where we leave offerings of Jelly Babies and small toys to one of the high gods of gaming.

Psychonauts is one of the reasons we hold Mr Schafer in such high regard. It's absolutely the most original and joyous pieces of gaming you'll find.

As trainee Psychonaut Raz, you have to enter teachers' minds – essentially themed dungeons – to develop your psychic abilities. After graduating you are sent out to enter the minds of various people in order to cure them of their mental wrongnesses. To say the gameplay is original and unconventional is an



understatement. For instance, your mentor appears out of your ear to give you tips; you become the figurehead of a lungfish revolution; discover a brain theft conspiracy at the Psychonauts training camp; befriend a kid who can't remove his hat, because people's heads explode; all of which happens in Technicolour worlds that make *Sam & Max* seem to be on Prozac and Valium.

There are some gameplay issues. *Psychonauts* plays like a console platformer and so demands using a controller. Playing with keyboard and mouse can be a nightmare, especially when it comes to boss battles. The camera isn't great, making it easy to get lost on wide-open levels. And you'll end up getting stuck plenty of times, seemingly out of bad design.

Well, obviously he's about to... er... um...



BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH



"Hey babe, what's your sign?"

But these flaws don't stop *Psychonauts* being bloody brilliant. Just stick in a controller and get stuck into the weirdness that is Tim Schafer's creative mind. **RC**

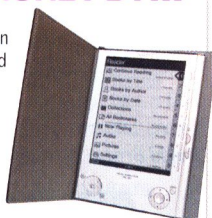
PCZONE

89

Psychotic joy

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Richard bought an e-book reader and sent it back as it was crap.
SAVING £0



Cumbria County Council didn't bother with a new swimming pool.
SAVING £Thousands



David stopped taking his pain medication.
SAVING Potential addiction



DARK FALL: THE JOURNAL

PUBLISHER JoWood WEBSITE snipurl.com/gog_darkfall PRICE \$5.99 (£3.60)

IF YOU'VE EVER experienced the kind of fear that slowly runs a frozen, clawed finger along your spine, as it gently strokes your stomach and whispers in your ear, daring you to turn and look it in the eye, you'll know what playing this game feels like.

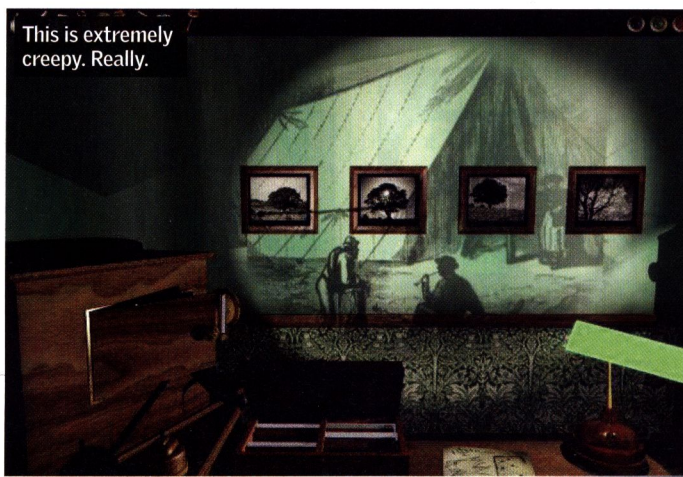
Basically, *Dark Fall* scares the living shite out of you. I played this in a brightly lit room, while builders were smashing and drilling holes in my flat's walls, and the game still had me frozen in terror.

Dark Fall is a flick-screen adventure, in a similar style to *Myst*. You jump

between locations solving puzzles – ranging from simple jigsaws to mind-bending maths and logic riddles – to find out why and how your brother and his friends vanished, while working at a mothballed, and haunted, railway station and hotel. And boy, is it haunted.

Each scene is beautifully rendered, down to '40s period posters and food tins, and the devs have used simple tricks of flickering lights and whispered voices to terrifying effect.

Dark Fall is a game from a bygone era. There's no action, it forces you to think, and doesn't let you go. Perfect for a chilled, and chilling, Sunday afternoon. **RC**



This is extremely creepy. Really.

PCZONE

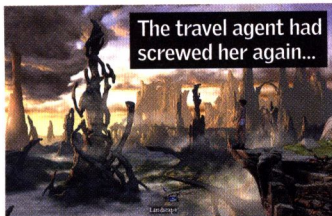
71

THE LONGEST JOURNEY

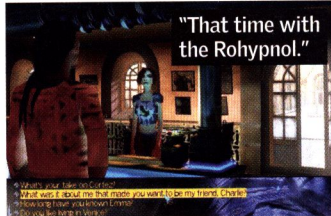
PUBLISHER JoWoodD WEBSITE snipurl.com/gog_darkfall PRICE \$9.99 (£6.00)

THIS LINE FROM a walkthrough which one of our readers found somewhere online expertly sums up *The Longest Journey*: "You see a blue small orifice. Click on it and use 'mouth' and you'll get a large orifice. Enter it."

So that doesn't sum it up at all, but it raises a titter or two regardless. The reason you were applying your mouth to an orifice was because you play April Ryan, a moony twentysomething living in a dystopian future who ends up, in a roundabout way, being chased by various security forces, and eventually toppling into another dimension and being the saviour of all beings etc etc.



The travel agent had screwed her again...



"That time with the Rohypnol."

For adventure game fans, it's a classic and rightly so. It might suffer a little from rigidly adhering to the *Longest* part of the name, with extended dialogue to make the brain melt and lots of relatively difficult puzzles, but it's all adventure-y goodness and for that reason it remains a firm favourite of all who've played it.

Just a pity they tossed things up for the sequel – *Dreamfall* – which was nowhere near as good as the original.

And where the hell are those 'episodes' we were promised years ago? **DB**

PCZONE
79

DIVINE DIVINITY

PUBLISHER Larian Studios WEBSITE snipurl.com/divinedivinity PRICE \$5.99 (£3.60)

THOUGH IT WAS one of those games that immediately erases itself from your memory the instant you complete it, *Divine Divinity* was a staggeringly good RPG.

While it did nothing new (not that it was trying to) it did a fantastic job of ticking the genre's boxes, resulting in a solid, lengthy, well written and well-balanced role-player.

The game also featured a farmer called Homer, which, for whatever reason, is the only lasting impression *Divine Divinity* made on me. His wife had a quest, and a little bit of a dialogue tree, but Homer said nothing, exuding quite pride and resilience to the madness of the dark world around him. Homer's bed was broken, too, in that you could pick it up and



Undertakers will do anything to raise new business.

carry it around with you in your backpack, deploying it when you really needed a nap.

Homer aside, the plot was incredible – you have to rescue a land being corrupted by evil magic – with main characters transforming into and out of demonic forms like you and I would change our underwear. *Diablo*-style random loot drops and clickety-click combat filled in the rest.

Divine Divinity is very good, and really cheap. Just don't expect any surprises. **SH**

PCZONE
70

AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



DUKE NUKEM 3D: ATOMIC EDITION
PRICE \$5.99 (£3.60), GOG
Dear God, need we say any more? Hail to the King baby!

83



PROJECT FREEDOM
PRICE £4.99, Steam
An arcade space combat game. Cheap, looks great, but let down by lacking a multiplayer mode.

67



METAL DRIFT
PRICE £7.99, Steam
Online multiplayer *Speedball*, only with hovertanks. Simple and fun, with explosions.

65

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PRICE £10, White Label

The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out

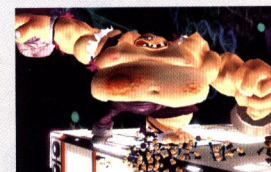
With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out

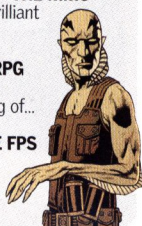
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 COMICS THAT SHOULD BE GAMES

- V FOR VENETTA**
So long as it doesn't ruin Alan Moore's original. Which it would.
- POWERS**
Brian Michael Bendis' brilliant ex-superhero cop comic.
- JUDGE DREDD - THE MMO**
Come on, how brilliant would this be?
- B.P.R.D. - THE RPG**
Excellent *Hellboy* spin-off. Speaking of...
- HELLBOY - THE FPS**
Again, how brilliant would this be?



PCZ TOP 5 TV SHOWS THAT SHOULD BE GAMES

- DOCTOR WHO**
But only if you can play Tom Baker's or Chris Eccleston's Doctor.
- FIREFLY**
Where is that go tsao de MMO?
- SUPERNATURAL**
It's practically a game already.
- DOLLHOUSE**
It could work... couldn't it?
- BATTLESTAR GALACTICA**
That dire top-down shooter doesn't count.

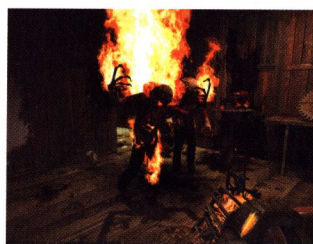


PCZ TOP 5 GAMES THAT SHOULD BE MOVIES

- MODERN WARFARE 2**
Actually pointless, as the game rips off every action movie ever made.
- WOLFENSTEIN 3D**
The original, not the latest one.
- RED ALERT**
It'd be bad, but that'd be the point.
- SECRETS OF MONKEY ISLAND**
The script is practically written already.
- PEGGLE**
Face it - it'll probably happen.



FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%
The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.

NEW ENTRY!



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 94%
Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new Infected, new campaigns, as well as machetes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dice. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

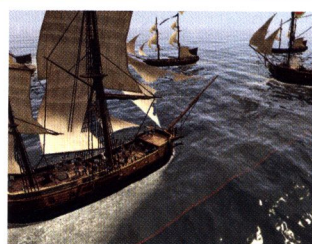
PCZ Issue: 188 - 89%
Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%
This psion of *System Shock 2* will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



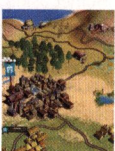
COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
A *Buyer's Guide* without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



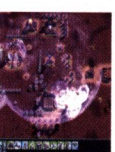
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 - 89%
Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck. *Arkham Asylum*'s mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3

PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious dicta, or a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *Arma II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2

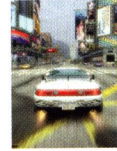
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.

NEW ENTRY!



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX

PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%
The *Need For Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

ODDBALL



SPORE

PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO

PCZ Issue: 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID

PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well-made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 – 88%
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 – 85%
The football industry may ignore *PES*, but *PES* doesn't ignore PC users. This year's *PES* includes updates from the console release, something that *FIFA 2010* can't claim.

NEW ENTRY!



NBA 2K10

PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 – 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3

PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

PCZ Issue: 214 – 93%
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue: 188 – 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

STEVE'S PICK



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue 179 – 88%
If you want to play *Garry's Mod* on some of the game's more interesting servers (the Goonie Goon Game servers are where you'll find the most amazing contraptions, in my opinion) you'll have to download about 4GB worth of content. This includes basic building blocks (something missing from the cache of *Source*-engine models shipped with *Garry's Mod*) as well as things like gears (which work as they should), railings along which spheres can roll, bits of jet planes and other very specifically useful objects.
You'll also be downloading maps. One of which turns *Garry's Mod* into a space-combat arena, replete with planets you can fly between and explore, some with inhospitable atmospheres, others covered in ice, and all capable of being built on. See if you can construct a spacecraft that can not only deliver you safely to the planet surfaces, but also protect you from the horror-vacuum of space. Or, if you're rubbish at building, simply watch other players carefully and purposefully bolting their inventions together. It's a relaxing pursuit.
Guides (and a way of easily downloading that broad range of crap you'll need before you can play online) can be found at ggg.bottlabs.org – though if you can't be bothered with any of that, I implore you to just play about offline with the default gubbins. Even if it's all you can do to put Alyx in sexy poses.

DAVID'S PICK



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue 214 – 88%
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearing missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact your imagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of *Excel*. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.
Like a good book, *FM2010* goes beyond the mere dry presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand.
Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins. Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 22 for the full run-down.

COMING SOON...

**BRITAIN'S NEWEST & BEST
ADULT ROCK FESTIVAL**

MEAN FIDDLER &

★CLASSIC★
Rock

PRESENT

HIGH VOLTAGE

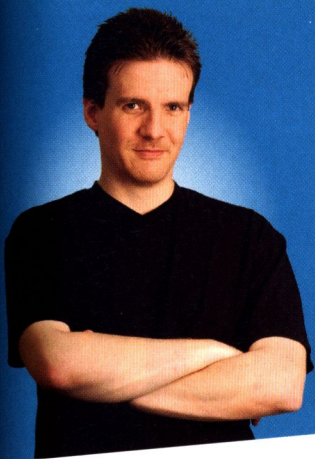


SATURDAY + SUNDAY
JULY 24/25, 2010
LONDON VICTORIA PARK

Tickets go on sale Friday, December 4

ACTS TO BE ANNOUNCED

For more info and newsletter subscription please go to highvoltagefestival.com



PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

MAC ATTACK

NOT LONG AFTER I'd heard their CEO admit publicly to preferring Apple Macs, it emerged that NVIDIA's new GeForce 310 launch was actually a 210 in all but the box artwork.

"It's just Mac, Mac, Mac!" enthused Jen-Hsun Huang, the company's 46-year-old chief executive and co-founder. Of course what he should have been saying was, "It's all crap, crap, crap!"

Let's be clear here: the 310 isn't something you can buy at your local store. It's an OEM-only model, meaning you'll only find it inside ready built PCs, and there's an argument that says that number on the sticker is largely meaningless.

There's also an argument that says because the 310 is an entry level product for entry level machines, the bottom line for buyers is what it all costs, not what it actually is underneath the paint and stickers. That's by the bye though. It doesn't stop the 310 being an unashamed marketing exercise that will deceive customers already bamboozled by incoherent naming schemes into buying something that isn't what they think it is. It isn't new. It isn't using NVIDIA's Fermi processor.

Still, who cares about the bottom rung of PCs? Huang gets a ludicrous annual salary of \$16million, meaning he should soon be able to afford a fourth Mac to add to the three he's been shouting about.

Handy

Phil Wand

Hardware editor

A POWERFUL PAIR

New gaming laptops provide plenty of power, but need plenty of cash



MSI's new GT740 was top of our Xmas wish list.

IF YOU'VE BEEN looking in dismay at the rat's nest of wires around your PC, this Christmas could be the time to make the switch to laptop gaming.

One of the companies hoping to tempt you away from your desktop is MSI. Increasing their existing range of 12 gaming laptops, the new GT740 and GT640 are two Core i7-based models costing £1,399 and £1,349 respectively.

Both quad core machines run Windows 7 Premium and feature Intel 720QM processors, 4GB DDR3 RAM, and onboard GeForce GTS 250M graphics as standard kit. The GT740 offers a 17in screen

compared to the 15.4in on the GT640 in addition to 5.1 sound, nine-cell battery and a slight weight penalty of 0.5kg. In short, forget the GT640.

You do need to be careful when choosing. While the 720QM is a fine engine, the GTS 250M is considered the bottom rung of its category, and it's arguable that gamers are served just as well by the older GT729. This model replaced the popular GT725, and at £1,100 is not only £200 cheaper but also comes with a decent Core 2 Quad and faster Mobility Radeon HD 4850.

The only downside to the GT729 is that it comes with Vista, so you'll need to budget a further £65 for a decent operating system. msicomputer.co.uk

THREE'S A CHARM USB 3.0 for the impatient

LAST ISSUE WE told you about ASUS's P7P55D, the first retail board to feature USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gbps. Now GIGABYTE's GA-P55A-UD6 arrives on shop shelves.

Unlike ASUS, GIGABYTE have had to steal bandwidth from the PCI-Express bus to make USB work – if you use SLI or CrossFire, high-speed USB and SATA turn off.

The GA-P55A-UD6 costs over £200, but let's be honest: there are few devices that support its next-gen features.

If you're looking to build a PC around a Core i5 or i7, spend £100 less on an entry level P55 board and put the difference towards a faster video card. giga-byte.co.uk



The GA-P55A-UD6 supports the unofficial new USB.

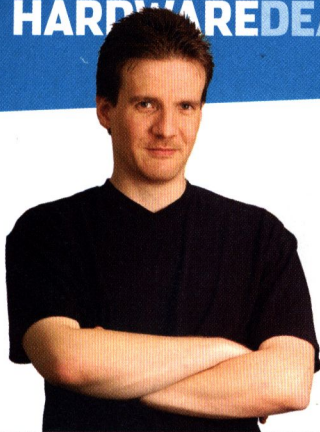
NEWS ROUND-UP

THE WIFE'S PC is an early Core 2 setup built around an ASUS P5K and bolted inside Antec's home theatre-style NSK2400 Fusion. Despite vowing never to buy Antec again after an horrific experience with the terrible MicroFusion Remote 350, the NSK1480 appears to be a hybrid of all the best bits from both. Definitely worth a look if you're using Windows 7 to build a Media Center PC for Christmas. Just remember you'll need half-height TV cards! antec.com

FEDEX HAVE DEVELOPED the SenseAware, a tiny GPS device with built-in accelerometer, thermometer and light sensor. Drop it in with your consignment of expensive, fragile items and at the end of the journey it'll say whether the courier has mishandled the goods. This could put an end to arguing with stores about hardware that was DOA. fedex.com

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**

WINDOWS VISTA: Microsoft's FUBAR OS that replaced Windows XP. The company denies rumours the name 'Vista' was chosen due to it rhyming with 'dog's dinner'. **imedia:** Desktop PC from Packard-Bell. Yet another example that marketing types believe adding an 'i' before any word makes something instantly cool. **TROJAN HORSE:** A type of malicious malware named after an incident of (literally) legendary stupidity. Though this one is not believed to have been invented by a Greek general. **MEDIA CENTER:** Type of PCs that act as control hubs for multi-room home entertainment systems. Popular with agoraphobics, the incurably antisocial, and people who can't spell.



Dear Wandy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

Q BOOKWORM NOTEBOOK

With regards to Joe Treford's letter in issue 214, you advised him not to buy a new graphics card now as "it will be defunct by Christmas".

I find this advice a little ill-given and the use of the word 'defunct' misleading. Granted, the magazine will be published after the release of the ATI 5850 (£200) and ATI 5870 (£300) which were not available until now, so you couldn't have recommended those. But it suggests any graphics cards out at Christmas, bar the new Radeons, will cease to function. Have you got some insight into a catastrophic disaster that will render GPUs useless come December 2009?

I envisage my GTX 280 lasting at least another year or two, and I've decided to get off the rat race of buying a new graphics card on release, because I do not think the 5800 series offers a big leap over my existing card. All DirectX 11 games are still a long, long way off, and from what I understand my GTX 280 will still work fine on them – just without the few extra graphical delights.

I just think some people with ATI or NVIDIA cards will read that and think they need to buy a new graphics card when they do not.

Julian Vicari

A You're right. "Defunct" was the wrong word to use. It suggests that once Santa has crammed his Michelin Man physique into your chimney, and has begun stumbling around the end of your bed looking for mince pies and



Right-click any Flash video to toggle video acceleration.

a glass of Teacher's, he'll inadvertently tread on your card and you'll wake up to find your screen blank, a sooty print on your case, and a note reading "shorry!"

So let's be clear: everyone's graphics card will not turn into a dead parrot at the end of this year. Windows 7 and the new DirectX will talk to current GPUs – whether they are brand new or years old – just fine.

Owners of older hardware will lose out on DirectX 11's visual magic and, if you have a dual- or quad-core system, a slight speed boost, but otherwise everything will appear just the same as before. Games, applications, everything.

Semantics aside, my advice in this particular circumstance remains unchanged. Put simply, if you have a high-end or high mainstream card – Joe had an 8800 GTS – don't get a new GPU when you know that your choice of replacements is going to get a lot bigger.

Q FLASH-FREEZE

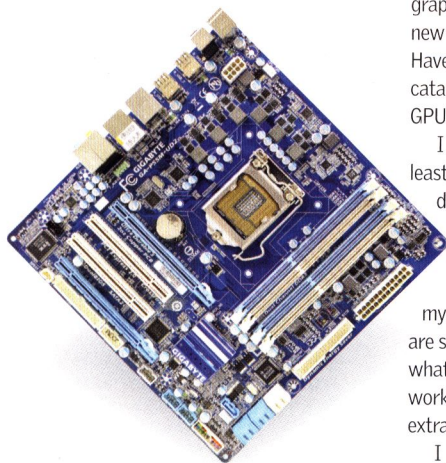
I have a Packard Bell IMEDIA X2414 with a Core 2 Quad Q6600, 3GB RAM and Windows Vista. I've just recently been afflicted with a fault when viewing stuff on the web like YouTube. The picture is fine except when I go to full screen mode when the picture turns monochrome and freezes. The audio continues as normal. When I restore it, everything's fine again.

When I use Windows Media Player, if I keep the cursor underneath the video area there's no problem, but if I move it over the video it turns monochrome, freezes, and I get audio only again.

Mik Shari

A Issues running video are like runny noses: how you come to have them and what makes them go away are often a complete mystery. That's not to say there isn't anything you can do to ease the problem.

The first thing is to think back. The fact it's only just started means it's



The cheapest P55 board currently on sale, GIGABYTE's £75 GA-P55M-UD2.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

| MANU | DESC | RELEASED |
|--------|-------------------|-----------|
| ATI | CATALYST 9.10 | 22 Oct 09 |
| NVIDIA | Force Ware 191.07 | 5 Oct 09 |

SOUND

| MANU | DESC | RELEASED |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Creative | X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004 | 30 Jul 08 |
| Creative | Creative Alchemy 1.20.04 | 01 Aug 08 |
| Creative | Audigy Beta 2.18.0001 | 17 Jul 08 |



Will Julian Vicari's GTX 280 stop working soon? In a word, no.

"Don't get a new GPU when you know that your choice of replacements is going to get a lot bigger"

almost certainly something you've installed recently. Try right-clicking on a Flash video and disabling hardware acceleration: does that help? If so, make sure you've upgraded to Vista Service Pack 1, that all other Windows updates are installed, and that you're using the most recent version of your browser. Your mission now is to switch hardware acceleration back on.

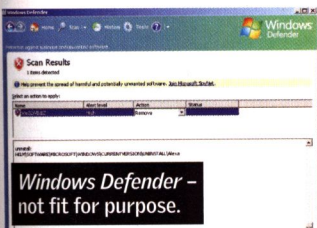
Double-check your video and platform drivers. Download the latest versions from the Packard Bell site – get both the NVIDIA Chipset drivers and the GeForce 7050 display drivers – then open your Programs and Features control panel and remove all the current software from there.

Next, pay a visit to the support section of packardbell.com and grab the most recent BIOS for your Denver 10 motherboard. Although that might sound daft, the NVIDIA nForce 790i chipset has problems relating to video playback and the 610i on your ECS board may misbehave the same way.

You also might want to try downgrading the version of Flash on your system: snipurl.com/flasharchive has links to all official versions ever released, but as you've reported identical trouble in Windows Media Player you may be wasting your time. Let me know how you get on!

Q WILLIAM'S DEFENDER

Over the last couple of years I've bumped into two annoying Trojans and Windows Defender has done bugger all to help. This despite me maintaining it religiously



with the weekly definition updates. It's like having a flat spare tyre, in that although it gives me peace of mind, it lets me down when I come to use it.

I'd like to get shot of it entirely and replace it with something worthwhile. Any suggestions?

Bill Coles

A Windows Defender *ain't* good for much. PC users tend to think it protects them from any virus and worm, whereas its remit is considerably narrower than that: it just blocks spyware. Viruses and worms fly far outside of Defender's radar, and I dread to think how much of the world's bandwidth is given over to its incessant updates or how many PCs remain infected as a result.

That said, I'd recommend not removing it unless you fancy deleting Windows system files from your hard disk and registry, which you probably don't. Given that it consumes less than 4MB of drive space inside your Program Files folder, I'd simply switch it off and then leave it to gather dust.

To do this, choose Windows Defender in your Control Panel list. Click the Tools menu at the top, then Options and Administrator. Remove the tick from the 'Use this program' checkbox and click Save. Simple as that.

The next step is to replace it with something that actually does the job you think it's doing. Thankfully, Defender's replacement was released a couple of months ago. Microsoft Security Essentials is a free 32-bit and 64-bit download for XP, Vista and Windows 7. See the box to the right for more information about it.

Q HIGH FIVE

I want my new machine to be quiet, start really fast and have HDMI output. I was thinking a Core i5 750, ASUS P7P55 Pro, Arctic Cooling

ALL ABOUT...

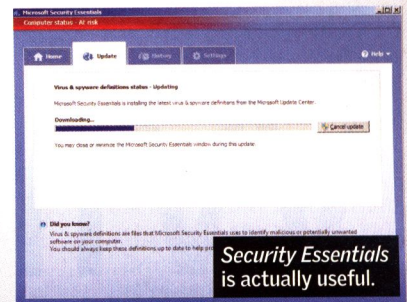
22 MICROSOFT SECURITY ESSENTIALS

Cheapskates rejoice! Microsoft have introduced a polished looking, free to download anti-virus program offering real-time protection against all sorts of malware.

Available now from microsoft.com, *Security Essentials* sits in your system tray and monitors your PC constantly for threats. It will also disable any existing installation of *Windows Defender* and provides a significantly greater level of protection by targeting all malware rather than just spyware.

When a threat is detected, you have the option of removing the infected file, quarantining it or allowing it to run. In this respect, the *Security Essentials* is indistinguishable from other solutions on the market and seems remarkably unintrusive overall.

If you're happy with your current security solution, or have recently renewed a subscription to it, be warned that *Security Essentials* does require existing security-related programs, such as anti-spyware and anti-virus tools, be removed before it's installed.



Freezer 7, Dominator DDR3 1600MHz RAM, and Corsair TX650W PSU in Antec's P183 case.

For the GPU, I was going to go for the Sapphire HD 5850 or HD 5770. What's the difference, and do I need an ASUS card if I have an ASUS board?

Hard drive-wise, I'm aiming for the WD Caviar Green 1.5TB and the 80GB Intel SSD for my Windows installation. But if this solid state drive reads at 250MB/sec and writes at 70MB/sec, why does the Caviar hard disk drive boast 300MB/sec read rate?

I have a budget of about £800.

Scott Hamilton

A The basics of your system are good. In your shoes I would probably switch the P7P55D Pro for a GIGABYTE GA-P55M-UD2 as you'll save yourself £25, and not see any difference in performance.

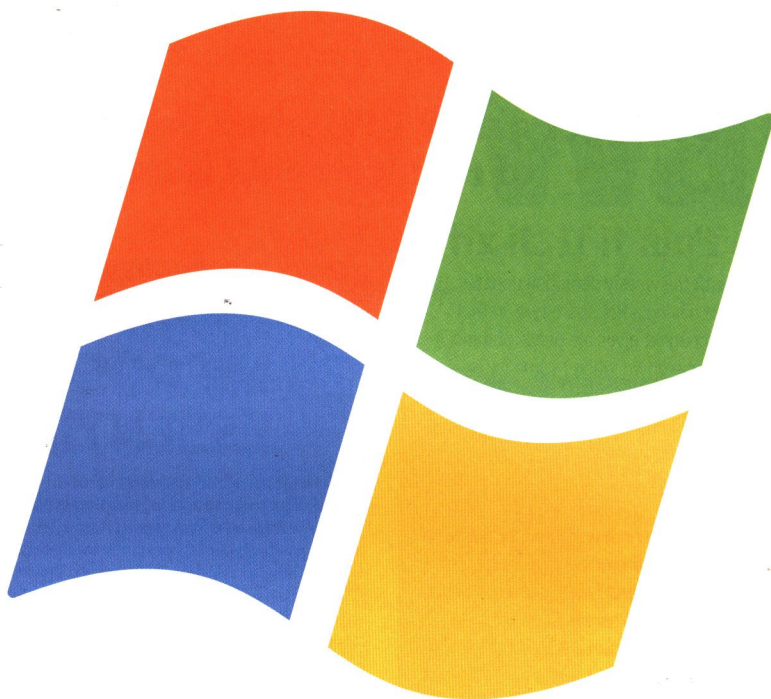
I'd also save the £15 you're intending to spend on the Arctic Cooling Freezer 7 as the fan supplied inside Intel's retail box may be as quiet as you'll need.

As for video, use the money you've banked to buy the HD 5850 rather than the HD 5770 and no, there's no need to match brands. The Sapphire card will be just fine on the GIGABYTE board.

Your storage requirements are more complicated. By all means go for the Intel X25-M drive but be careful about changing its firmware – I would wait until next year before you upgrade anything. I'd also expect the Western Digital drive to average performance at about 70MB per second, so I don't know where your figures comes from. Are you sure you weren't confusing the HDD's speed with the 300MB/sec theoretical maximum of the SATA HDD interface? **PCF**

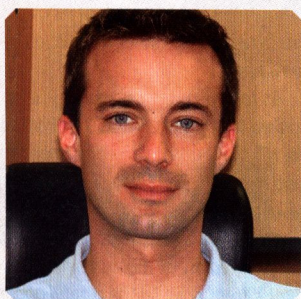
FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(8bit) Are there any household surfaces/items that can be safe to place CPU/memory chips on while working on PCs? Also can static only be harmful if touching the pins of a CPU or can it be damaged if touching anywhere on the chip? (al4omega) Whenever I have done any work, I've some spare anti-static bags and I place them in there. (Rich) I build stuff just on top of a motherboard box or something. (8bit) Is it true anti-static bags attract static on the outside but not the inside? (Rich) I wouldn't personally use them, they don't actively do anything. (darth_careful) Anti-static bags are Faraday cages, so they only work when they're closed. Using them as a workmat won't have any effect.



Windows® 7

Adam Hartley finds out if Windows 7 is a revolution for gamers



**BRIAN JOYCE,
ALIENWARE**

"Windows 7 is a must-have for PC gamers because it outperforms XP and Vista where gamers will notice it most: in games. Dell are experiencing a nearly 10% increase in select in-game benchmarks over Vista, nearly 20% quicker boot times, and full DirectX 11 support."

THE HYPE MACHINE

The hype surrounding October's launch of Windows 7 has come and gone, and there are still plenty of gamers yet to be sold on the direct benefits gained from shelling out for the new OS. Perhaps it's those raw emotional scars, painfully scratched by the memory of that Vista upgrade. Or, more likely, they have yet to actually play a DirectX 11-powered game that shows off what Windows 7 is going to do for PC gaming.

Alternatively, if you have already installed Windows 7 but have still to push DirectX 11 gaming to its current, hugely-impressive limits, it's likely that you don't fully understand what's under the hood of Microsoft's new OS. Sure, it makes your PC faster, more stable and secure, gives it a bit of spit and polish with a more Mac OS X-esque look and feel, but what else has it delivered.

"With Windows 7 we've made a lot of enhancements around general performance, which is the baseline, in terms of decreasing the overall size of the OS, making sure the memory



Windows 7's touchscreen controls could genuinely revolutionise gaming.

footprint was a lot smaller, so that overall the PC is a lot snappier and things like start-up and resume times are much quicker," Microsoft UK's Leila Martine told us.

Martine holds the impressively lengthy job title of Windows Consumer Business Group Lead, which means she is the authority on what Windows 7 means for gaming. She sees the user-

interface design, stability, and speed improvements as combining to make an important starting point. "Because when we start to think about the future of gaming on the Windows platform, there are so many new devices that are coming out on the market such as netbooks, touchscreen desktops, new high-end PCs, all of which bring new opportunities to PC games developers."



Touchscreen controls has been one key aspect of *Windows 7* hyped by Microsoft. Martine confirms that, "In terms of incorporating touchscreen input into power gaming, our corporate team at Microsoft is continually talking to games developers about what they need and how we can work with them to help them deliver it."

STROKE YOUR PC

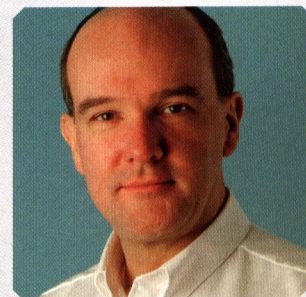
What Microsoft refers to as the 'touchscreen ecosystem' is being developed very quickly, with the software giant promising us new and different types of touch-controlled games within the year. Details on exactly what these might be are currently scarce. Martine remains resolutely tight-lipped when pressed on plans to bring Project Natal to the PC.

"I don't really have anything for you on that right now!" she demurs. "But you can imagine. What we can say is that we want to be visionary. And between the kinds of things that we are doing on Xbox, such as Natal, and the opportunities around the fact that we own the gaming platform on PC. And we now have this new touch interface..." her voice trails off, until she picks up the beat and is straight back in with... "But do we want to continue innovating? Absolutely! And we have lots of great games publishers who will be there with us to do that. So that's really the only statement I can make at this time on that."

Microsoft's latest ultra-casual, free games offerings in *Windows 7* are clearly perfect for mucking around with on netbooks. And we have to

begrudgingly admit that the new online elements in games such as *Checkers* are pretty addictive. The market for netbooks is only going to continue to grow in 2010, with machines getting a size boost and more over the next year, as more manufacturers make use of Intel's new thin and light ultra-low voltage (CULV) processor.

However, Martine thinks the most exciting time for gamers will be "when more of the NVIDIA Ion netbooks start to arrive on the market, when we'll start to see significantly better media capabilities on netbooks, much improved graphics." Though she is quick to add this: "It won't be power gaming by any stretch of the imagination, but the overall experience will be much improved by moving some of the processing duties to the Ion GPU."



RICHARD HUDDY, AMD

"Consoles have really taken off over the last few years. But what I would say is that the majority of gaming publishers are developing for the PC, if only for the sheer numbers. So the variety of PC gaming has only continued to flourish. In terms of new devices coming out, new touch control technology coming out, we are continuing to innovate. And it's that innovation that is really key for this latest version of *Windows 7*."

But when it comes down to proper games, things come down to DirectX 11.

Microsoft's latest graphics and sound controller has seen improvements in terms of overall performance, shadow modelling and tessellation from DirectX 10, and it now allows your PC to use graphics cards to do a lot of the grunt work of running a game. All of this basically means you get better frame rates and faster gaming. And that you won't find yourself sat waiting in load screens anywhere near as long.

Windows 7 also opens up opportunities for stuff like ATI's

WHET YOUR WHISTLE

Some of the games that will support DirectX 11

With improved backward compatibility and groundbreaking tessellation and direct compute tech, Microsoft says DirectX 11 delivers games that are 30x faster. So next year is clearly going to be an fantastic year for PC gaming.

Codies' *DiRT 2* and EA's *BattleForge* are two games that have already paved the way, plus we have belters such as *Crysis 2* and *Battlefield 3* penned in for late 2010. The following are our top DX11 games to look forward to early next year.



STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT

The RPG/FPS sequel to *STALKER* is due out in January.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

The popular MMO gets a DirectX 11 sprucing in January.



ALIEN VS PREDATOR

Promises faster and better looking Aliens, Predators and Marines.



ALAN WAKE

The definitive DirectX 11 version follows soon after its console cousin in Spring.



LEILA MARTINE, MICROSOFT UK

"2010 and 2011 will be very good years for PC gaming. I mean, the stuff that we see coming through on console tech is all about reviving the console – stuff like Project Natal which is aiming to make Xbox 360 more accessible to a wider market."

"Also, it looks like the console vendors are keen to make lots of public announcement about how they are not updating their hardware over the next year."

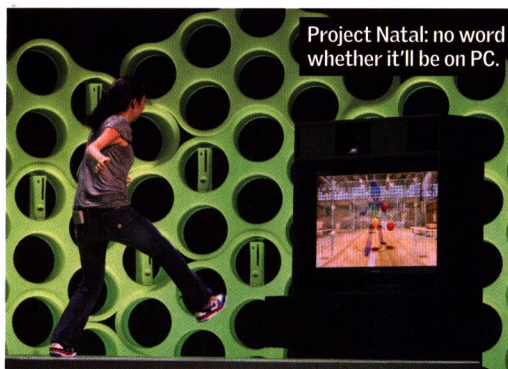
"Previously there's been a sense in which console hardware development has acted as a kind of drag or brake on PC gaming hardware development."

"But now with DirectX 11 you can take many of the assets from an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 game and simply render them at a far higher quality than is possible on those two devices."

▶ bleeding-edge Eyefinity tech, which can now be used to set up any flight sim or driving game fan's ultimate gaming experience – outputting your game to six hi-def screens at once. We've played *DiRT 2* on such a set up and our eyes actually bled with joy.

GAMING RENAISSANCE

"Windows 7 brings a lot to the PC gaming table, in my mind," agrees Richard Huddy, Worldwide Developer Relations Manager for AMD. "There's that list of technical features, most notably all the new stuff in DirectX 11."



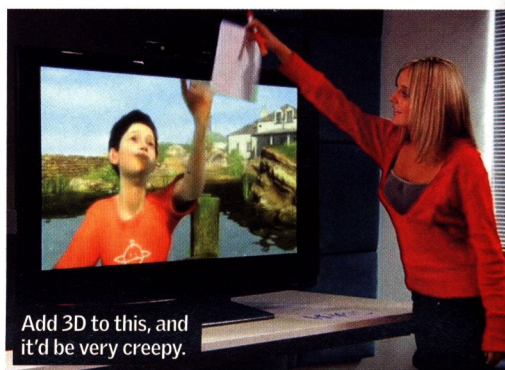
Project Natal: no word whether it'll be on PC.



Look – no steering wheel!



Anything a Wii can do, a PC can do better.



Add 3D to this, and it'd be very creepy.

But on top of all the new technical benefits there is another really important trend."

The fact that DirectX 11 software support is also available in *Vista* massively helped the transition from *Vista* to *Windows 7* for games developers. Back in November 2005 when *Vista* first came out the take-up of DirectX 10 by games developers was relatively slow. It took around six months after the OS's launch for the first DirectX 10 game to ship.

The problems back then were strictly business because while devs such as Crytek – who build their reps by being seen to be producing PC games at the cutting-edge in terms of graphics – were keen to push DirectX 10 to its limits, the DX9-to-DirectX 10 transition was still "somewhat painful, even for those companies," according to AMD.

Fast-forward to today and Huddy is adamant that this is the best DirectX transition he's ever seen, simply because there's a substantial installed base of 50% of *Vista* users, who can run DirectX11 games as soon as they install *Windows 7*. This instantly changes the market dynamic for any PC games publisher or developer.

"So you can see why *Windows 7* is a really far more attractive proposition for games developers," argues the AMD man. "I mean, being one of the leading

vendors for DirectX 11 hardware in the market, I'm bound to say that it's great, aren't I? Gamers can decide for themselves in time whether it's true."

"The best thing is that I can back that statement up with the fact that – unlike the fix or six months gap between DirectX 10 hardware launching and the first games arriving – there were DirectX 11 games on the shelf before there was any hardware available."

"There was a lot of DirectX 11 code out there within weeks of Windows 7's launch"

He's only right as well. EA's *BattleForge*, for example, was out back in September and there's also a bunch of other DirectX 11 games out now (like *DiRT 2*), and due early in 2010, such as *STALKER: Call of Pripyat*, as well as new DirectX 11 game engines from the likes of Eastern European devs such as Unigen. So there was a lot of DirectX 11 code out there within weeks of *Windows 7*'s launch.

THE SCIENCE BIT

As is always the case though, to get the best out of *Windows 7* gaming you are going to need the best DirectX 11 graphics hardware you can afford. This is because, in addition to Microsoft's software innovations, DirectX 11 is based on a number of technical

innovations made in graphics processor units (GPUs). One of the main benefits here is tessellation – a technology which lets your PC create a large number of highly detailed triangles inside the graphics card.

On top of that, you have the new Shader Model 5, "which runs something like *BattleForge* a staggering 30% faster than it would on DX 10.1 hardware" claims AMD.

And these two features alone give games developers a lot to play with. Instead of having 5-10 million triangles per second on screen at any one time, they can now

have hundreds of millions. Most importantly this lets artists introduce the smooth curves that they had in mind for the art style in their games. And it's allowing some devs, such as Rebellion, to achieve a massive quality win within games such as *Aliens vs Predator*, all at hardly any extra cost.

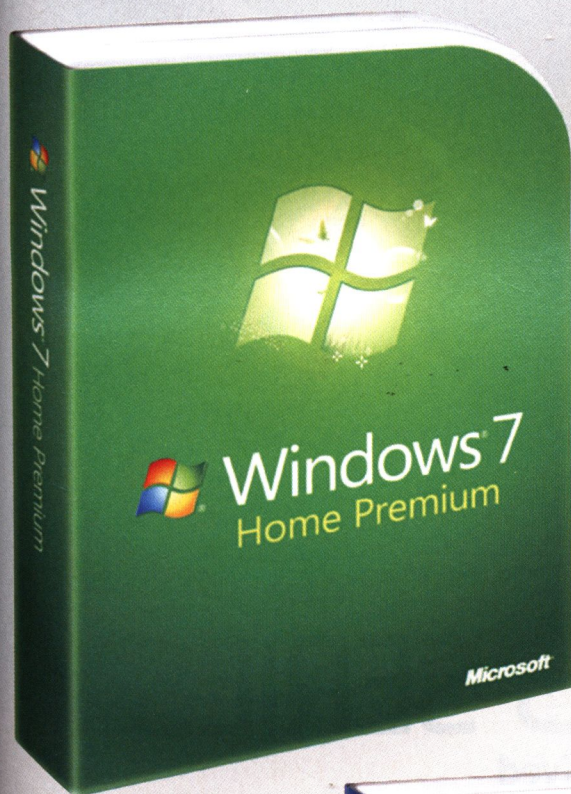
What all this means is that PC game developers can now start to release the best-quality DirectX 11 versions of their games that will be sure to run on the widest possible range of hardware out there. "It's not just an option anymore," says AMD's Huddy, "it's actually the most sensible business decision for them to make."

For now *Windows 7* offers better graphics, a stable platform. And for the future? Who knows. **PCZ**

WHICH WINDOWS IS RIGHT?

There are a few *Windows* to pick from. Just like in Playschool

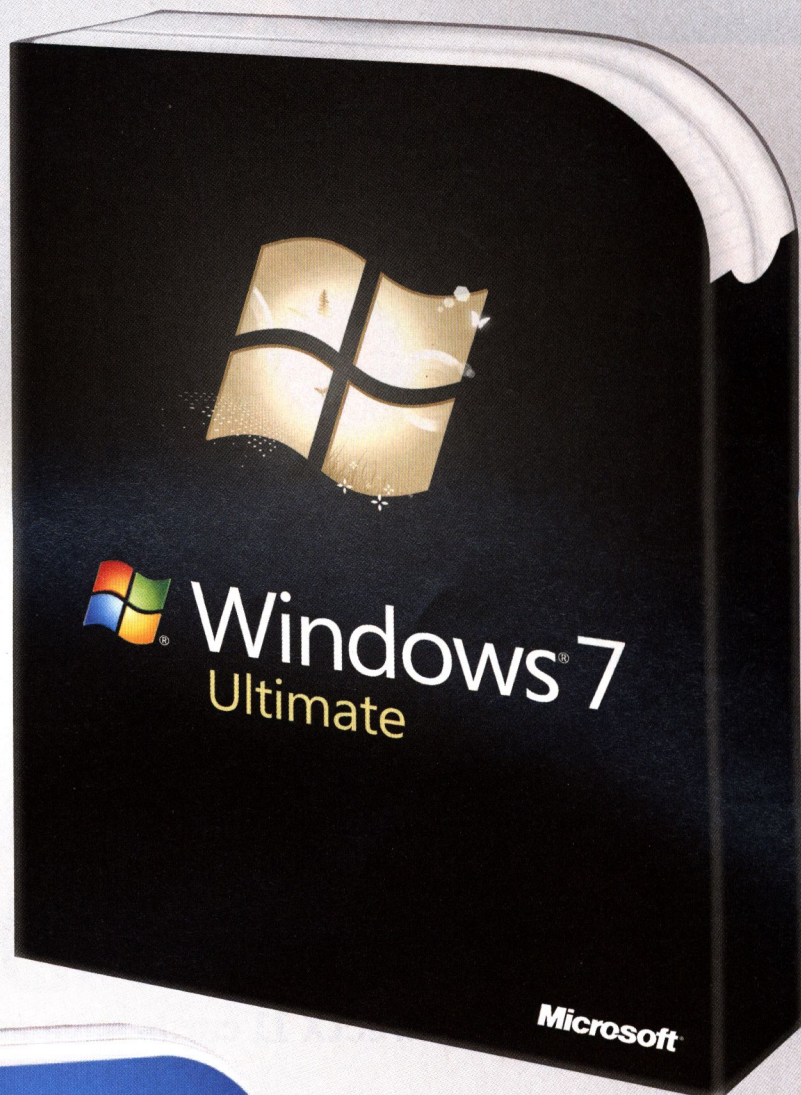
Ignoring the excruciatingly embarrassing "I made this" ads for *Windows 7*, the bottom line is that you're going to have to upgrade if you're running XP or Vista. There's no point fighting it, unless you're in the market for a new PC in 2010, but there are three versions of Microsoft's latest OS. So, here's the *Windows 7* need-to-know.



WINDOWS 7 HOME PREMIUM

PRICE £99.99 (upgrade), £149.99 (full)

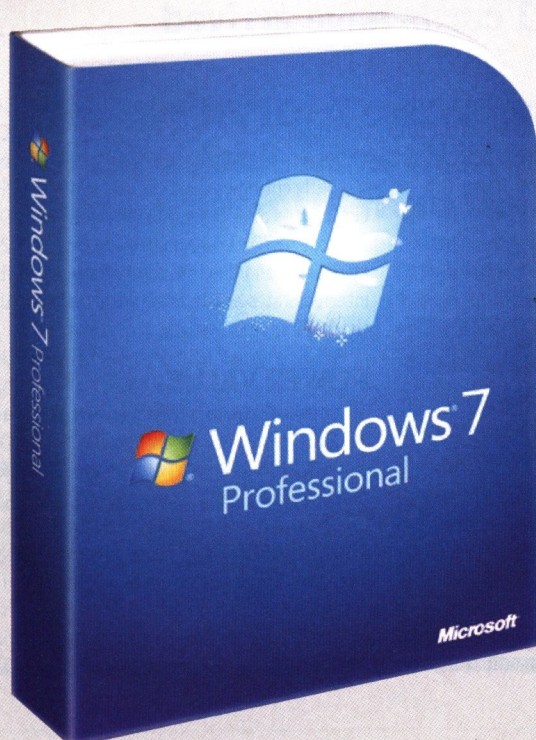
This version is ideal for most users, if all they want to do is play games at home. It includes *Windows* functions seen in *Vista* (only they work properly), as well as *Windows Media Center*. *Home Premium* comes with 32-bit and 64-bit versions in the box, so there's no worries about buying the wrong one.



WINDOWS 7 ULTIMATE

PRICE £199.99 (upgrade), £229.99 (full)

This – the most expensive version of *Windows 7* – has powerful networking utilities, include *AppLocker* (stops unauthorised programs being run) and *BitLocker* (disc encryption). This one is really only of interest to IT staff of huge companies with demanding networking needs.



WINDOWS 7 PROFESSIONAL

PRICE £189.99 (upgrade), £219.99 (full)

What you need if you also use your PC to connect to your work network. Packs data encryption utility and server management tools. It also has the *Windows XP Mode* – handy if you want to keep your old *XP* software working.

DIRECTX 11 DISCLAIMER

We can't say how much DirectX 11 will advance gaming graphics, as there aren't any games out there that push the hardware or the API itself. There are more DirectX 11 releases due (turn to page 94 for some of them), but it won't be until the middle of 2010 that we'll see how support is really shaping up. So for now we have to see how the ATI 5-series perform under DX10.

ASUS HD 5850 BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 1680 x 1050

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Resident Evil 5 | 92.9 |
| World in Conflict | 56 |
| Far Cry 2 | 77.4 |

ATI RADEON HD 5-SERIES

The first affordable DirectX 11 cards have arrived

THE RADEON HD 5870 (issue 215) may be an incredible graphics card, but it costs considerably more than AMD's previous models. Now before NVIDIA can respond with its own range of affordable DirectX 11 cards, AMD

have released three spin-offs from the 5870's core GPU: the HD 5850 (£210), HD 5770 (£130) and HD 5750 (£100).

All three use the same 40nm production process and feature the same DirectX 11-supporting engine as the 5870, but each card has had its

features pruned in order to meet these price points.

As its name implies, the 5850 is a slightly cut-down 5870. It has a core clock speed of 725MHz (75MHz slower than the 5870), 1,440 unified shaders (10% less), and the 256-bit memory interface rates at 1GHz (200MHz under the 5870's).

10 cards. The GeForce GTX275 costs £30 less, and puts in near identical benchmarks in *World in Conflict* and *Resident Evil 5*. That said, it can't handle DirectX 11 and *Far Cry 2* runs almost 20fps slower than under the 5850, but it's evidence that AMD have messed up the 5850's pricing slightly

The 5770 and 5750 cards have undergone harsher pruning. Each offers half the unified shaders of the 5870 and 5850 (respectively), and 128-bit GDDR5 memory interfaces, rather than 256-bit.

Easily the most interesting of the two cards, the HD 5770's operates at the same 850MHz core and 1.2GHz memory clocks as the 5870, but it has half the unified shaders and render output unit (ROPs). This means the 5770 performs far below the 58xx

SPECIFICATIONS

| | ASUS HD 5850 | HIS HD 5770 | SAPPHIRE HD 5750 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| PRICE | £209 | £127 | £97 |
| MANUFACTURER | ASUS | HIS | Sapphire Technology |
| WEBSITE | uk.asus.com | www.hisdigital.com/gb | sapphiretech.co.uk |
| GPU CLOCK | 725MHz | 850MHz | 700MHz |
| UNIFIED SHADERS | 1,440 | 800 | 720 |
| MEMORY | 1GB GDDR5 1000MHz | 1GB GDDR5 1200MHz | 1GB GDDR5 1200MHz |
| MEMORY BUS | 256-bit | 128-bit | 128-bit |
| SCORE | 88 | 82 | 72 |

POWER VALUE

These sacrifices are reasonable, given the £100 price cut, but you shouldn't worry that the card falls short – it remains an incredible piece of tech. *Far Cry 2* ran at 65fps at 1680 x 1050 and 40fps at 2560 x 1600. These are incredible frame rates from a card that costs £200.

The 5850 does face a small problem: AMD and NVIDIA's outgoing DirectX

HIS HD 5770 BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 1680 x 1050

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Resident Evil 5 | 64.7 |
| World in Conflict | 37 |
| Far Cry 2 | 29 |

SAPPHIRE HD 5750 BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 1680 x 1050

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Resident Evil 5 | 56.3 |
| World in Conflict | 33 |
| Far Cry 2 | 29 |

The ASUS HD 5850 (left), HIS HD 5770 (mid), and the Sapphire HD 5750 (right).

series cards (as evidence, *Fry Cry 2*'s frame rates were nearly half that of the 5850).

The chip still boasts over 1 billion transistors, which is 84 million more than the 4870. Yet it can't outpace the earlier Radeon, as a huge chunk of this extra silicon has been dedicated to DirectX 11 operations, and it uses a 128-bit memory interface. As the prices of 4870 and 4890 cards are continuing to drop, this means it's difficult to get

"Before NVIDIA can respond with its own range of affordable DirectX 11 cards, AMD have released three spins-offs from the 5870"

too excited about the Radeon HD 5770.

In terms of raw specs, the Radeon HD 5750 isn't exciting, with its 720 unified shaders, 700MHz core clock, and a 128-bit memory interface. This card won't outperform much, even

faring poorly compared to a 512MB Radeon HD 4850 – a card available for £20 less (and will likely fall in price further as DX11 cards get a grip on the market).

MIXED BAG

While the 5850 will deliver a serious performance boost for your current run of games, and will let your PC support DirectX 11, the 5770 or 5750 aren't worth considering. Especially if you've bought a graphics card in the last year.

Things are a little trickier if you haven't upgraded for a while. This is

because there's an incredible amount of power to be had for not a lot. It's early days for the 5750 and 5770, and prices are currently inflated due to the lack of competition. Even so, if you're looking for a bargain, get a GTX 275 or a 4870.

But if you want to see what DirectX 11 can deliver, and the rest of your system is under 12 months old, the 5850 is where your money should go.

However, if your PC is past its first birthday, you should look at upgrading to a completely new Windows 7 PC, packing a Core i7 processor and a new HD 5850 card. **AD**

COMPARISON BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 1680 X 1050

| | HD 5870 | GTX 275 | HD 4890 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| RESIDENT EVIL 5 | 105.9 | 91.9 | 84.8 |
| WORLD IN CONFLICT | 66 | 56 | 51 |
| FAR CRY 2 | 77.4 | 45.2 | 43.7 |

REMEMBER:**DON'T CONFUSE
"MISSING DLL" AND
"MISSING DILL"**

If you get an error message referring to a missing DLL, Google the file name and download a new one from the internet. Do not break open your computer and liberally sprinkle the hard drive and motherboard with dill. Fresh dill is good on salmon. It's not good for a PC.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

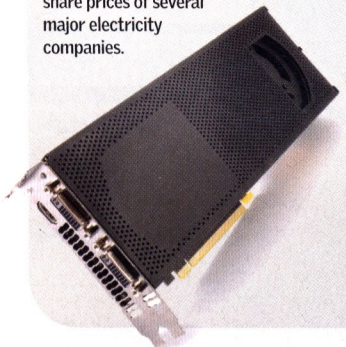
GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295

PRICE £436

zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965

PRICE £839

intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3

PRICE £529

onec.com



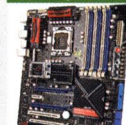
If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £321

asus.com



This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1

PRICE £144

auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live – you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99

seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and – storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £195

logitech.co.uk



The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

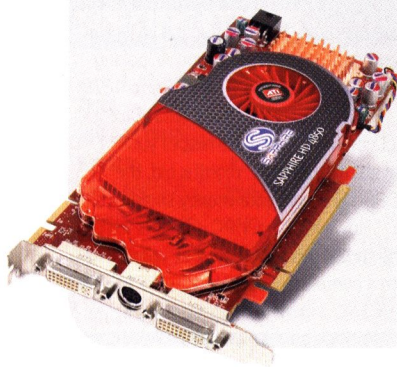
GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850

PRICE £120

sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.

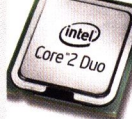


PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £44

intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

PRICE £60

asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS

PRICE £30

wdc.com



A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VIEWSONIC VA903M

PRICE £118

viewsoniceurope.com



The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUNDCARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20

uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530

PRICE £55

logitech.co.uk



Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

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PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

OUTSTANDING

THE QUESTION OF what my favourite game of 2009 had been was put to me recently. Twice in fact, once by our inquisitive editor herself and once by some bloke from Gamespot. It should be easy, right? I've given a few games some high marks, like *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising*, *Empire: Total War* and, most recently, the basketball game, *NBA 2K10*. But this is where it all gets a bit hazy, where my indecision kicks in.

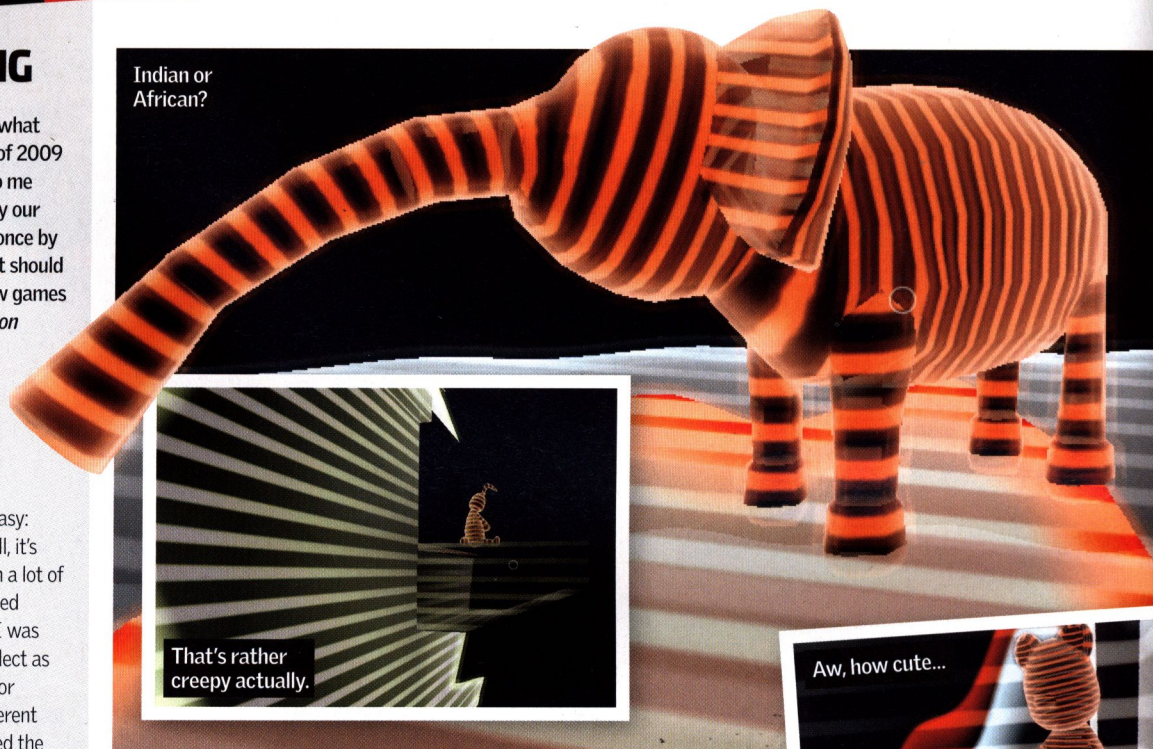
Last year, the choice was easy: *The Witcher*. But this year, well, it's not been easy. There have been a lot of good games, the aforementioned three being but a handful, yet I was stumped as to which one to select as the standout best. I plumped for *Empire* in the end, but in a different mood (and if I hadn't just played the *Napoleon* expansion the day before too) I'd have picked *NBA* or even the newly released *Left 4 Dead 2*.

It seems that there's either been a levelling off of quality in the industry or I've just played so many games that it has to be something truly outstanding to rise from the pack, even if, on their own, they are classic games. *The Witcher* was such a game, but has there been one this year? I'm still not certain. One thing I know is that I've played a lot of good games this year and, obviously, some utterly woeful ones. In fact, for every *Empire* there's a *Grey's Anatomy*. Perhaps I just need to stop being so cautious and nail my colours to a game's mast.

(And *Cryostasis* was in the mix too. So if you haven't, give it a try. You get to play a polar bear for a bit of it!)

David Brown
Staff writer

Indian or African?



That's rather creepy actually.

Aw, how cute...

Stairway to heaven?

THROWING THE HORNS

University project shakes the indie game dev community

WEBSITE devilstuningfork.com

THE QUESTION POSED by the developers of *Devil's Tuning Fork* runs thus: "What if you saw the world with your ears?" Well, apart from having a massive blind spot right in front of you (unless you had massive lugs like Gary Lineker) we think it'd be interesting. What they really mean is how would you perceive the world if sound rather than light was your main aural stimulus.

Developed by a group of DePaul University students, who were advised by a set of industry notables, as an entry

in the Independent Games Festival, *Devil's Tuning Fork* is all about a child who falls into a coma and wakes in an alternate dimension. Here he learns other kids have had similar experiences, and finds his ears act as his eyes, and using his new shell-shaped peepers, he needs to save the world by solving echolocation-related puzzles.

This is achieved by using the titular tuning fork, a "magical instrument that allows the player to perceive sound waves". So, basically, you have to use the fork to find the rest of the comatose

children and lead them like the Pied Piper all the way to, in this case, safety.

This is one of those games that has to be played before you can understand it completely. It might not be the most amazing thing in strict gameplay terms, but the potential for someone to run with this idea in a bigger title is huge. Just like *Narbacular Drop* lead to *Portal*, we like to think it's possible *Devil's Tuning Fork* could also lead to something great.

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



998
HOURS*



HEY THERE, OLD TIMER

All the peoples of the world singing in *Harmony*

WEBSITE robotik.nl/harmony.htm

SOME GAMES ARE a long time coming, but some free ones take even longer. We're not talking *Duke Nukem Forever*-style tardiness here, but taking eight years to make a game using the zDoom engine is an achievement none at Zone Towers could ever muster.

Once the game is finished though, surely that near-decade in production will have thrown up the greatest thing ever made? Imagine if *Steve's Hat Game* were to be in development for nigh-on a decade – just think of the headgear-related possibilities. Think of the geese!

But we're not here to discuss bowlers or fedoras, we're here for *Harmony*,

a new FPS from the brain pan of Thomas van der Velden.

As you can imagine, no stone seems to have been left unturned, with all sorts of original graphics and music jammed into the game. It's not the most visually lush game though – you'd have thought after this time, it would look a bit more colourful and vibrant.

The graphics do have one startling feature that's worth commenting on, which is the fact the enemies are all animated from clay models TV (as he likes to be known) built. For a free game based on an ancient FPS engine, this level of dedication isn't just admirable, it's mind-boggling.

As for the gameplay, there's nothing that new here. There's only so much one can do with the zDoom engine, after all. So, you've got your traditional *Doom*-style movement, with a bit of mouse-aiming thrown in, and it's all challenging for us mollicoddled modern gamers. There's a bit too much backtracking and traipsing about the 11 huge levels, which is a shame, but overall all this is a very solid game.

While *Harmony* needs a bit of sandpapering around the edges, and maybe a few more exciting textures, there's not much else you can turn to at the moment for some free old-school *Doom* fun.



SNIPPETS



SORE ARSE

WEBSITE dinoday.com

Fancy kicking some Nazi Dinosaurs up the bottom? You'll have to wait a little bit until *Dino D-Day* comes out. It'll be a *Half Life 2* mod, so chances are virtually all of you'll get the chance to play it as well.



ON THE BENCHMARK

WEBSITE cop.stalker-game.com

Wonder if your PC could handle *STALKER: Call of Pripyat*? Wonder no longer as you can now ease your concerns using the official site's benchmarking utility. It's also a chance to see where the game's at right now.

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH SHIP SIMULATOR 2008 V1.1

"Fixed the random sinking of ships when starting a mission."



SPREAD THE INFECTION

Rock to a new *Left 4 Dead 2* campaign

WEBSITE midnight-riders.com

THE DUST HASN'T settled on *Left 4 Dead 2* and already there's talk of more levels starring Midnight Riders – the band featured in *Dark Carnival*.

The main question is whether or not the campaign will be free. Our gruesome cousins in console land will

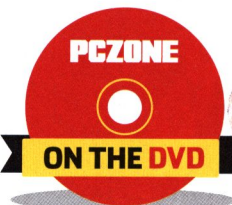
be expected to fork over an exorbitant fee for the privilege of playing the game, but there's a rumour that PC users will also be tarred with the paid DLC brush.

We're expecting a tsunami of internet rage to overwhelm Valve's offices if PC players are forced to pay

for it, as that's just not the Valve way. It'll also be interesting to see whether any rage is directed towards Microsoft, because of the theory that most of the delays and problems related to *L4D1* were due to its link with the Xbox.

Let's keep our fingers crossed it'll be free until we have more evidence.

Demos



Richard Cosgrove tours the new polymer disc

PES 2010

Get on the field

WEBSITE konami-pes2010.com

FOOTBALL IS A subject that literally divides the *PC ZONE* team. Half of us spend most of the day discussing teenagers who are paid obscene amounts of money to knock a leather ball into a big net, while the rest of us roll eyes and wonder what the fuss is about.

But everyone on *PCZ* coos at *PES 2010*: the soccer atheists at the superb graphics, and the footie lovers at the great games of soccer they played.

Now you've got the chance to test out *PES 2010* for yourself. This demo lets you take part in five-minute exhibition matches between Liverpool and Barcelona, or between the national teams of Germany, Spain, France [insert favourite handball and/or Thierry Henry joke here] and Italy.

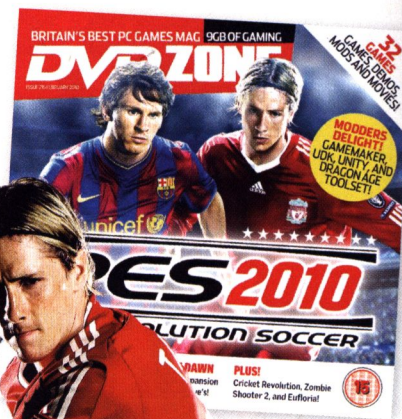
You won't get a full game in, but you will get a taste of *PES 2010*'s new animations, improved AI, and 360° controls. The only thing you'll need to finish that match day feeling is a long scarf and a cheap meat pie.

PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The *PC ZONE* discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



Offside ref! Offside! It isn't? Ah, who cares?

Is that legal?

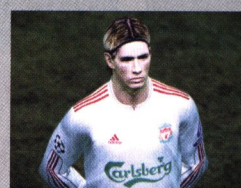
Has to be down to invisible high chairs.

"The only thing you'll need to finish that match day feeling is a long scarf and a cheap meat pie"



RICH VS POOR

Jermain Defoe leads England out for another ritual humiliation at the hands of Andorra. Will the plucky millionaires be able to defeat their part-time opponents?



WANTED: ASPIRIN

Fernando Torres grimaces in pain as he's forced to play through the pain barrier yet again because Liverpool don't seem to have any other strikers capable of scoring goals.

THE JOURNEY TO ZONDALAND...



ER... WHO?

Portsmouth come out to deal with the threat of the Anfield mob. Rather, Pompey come out, as Portsmouth haven't licensed themselves into the game. Good old *PES*.



CORRUPT REF

More misery is heaped on the men in red as Fabio Aurelio is thrown off by a card-happy git in yellow. Obviously he's been given a load of cash by the opposition.

MODDER'S DELIGHT

You've got no excuse to not mod

WEBSITE udk.com, unity3d.com, dragonage.bioware.com/toolset

We've gathered the most powerful game design suites together, so you can get modding.

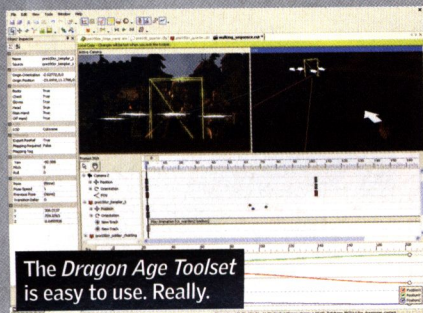
UDK is a free version of the *Unreal Engine 3* toolset. This isn't limited to making mods for *Unreal*. Check out *Whizzle* on the DVD for proof.

Unity is a cut-down version of the \$1,500 *Unity* suite used by pro indy devs. It can turn its hand to sports games, space sims, and shooters.

BioWare's *Dragon Age Toolset* can make new locations, lip-synced cut-scenes and cinematics, as well as combat scenarios for this excellent RPG.

Also on the disc are *DarkRadiant*, a *Doom 3* level editor, and YoYo's *GameMaker 7*, which Steve's using to make *The Hat Game*.

Tell us when you make something with these kits. Turn to page 125 for how to get in touch.



The *Dragon Age Toolset* is easy to use. Really.

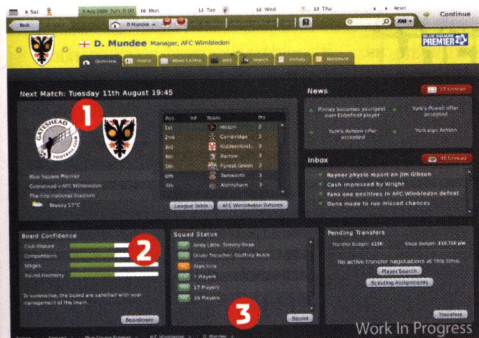
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010 - VANILLA

They were out of mint choc chip

WEBSITE footballmanager.com

THIS IS THE definitive football team management game that has kept thousands of men staring at their monitors, while their partners and spouses file for divorce. This demo will give you a taster of the latest version of

FM by including the databases for the English and Scottish leagues, with one other important difference to the main game – the graphics: the Vanilla demo lacks player photos and logos. But if you want pretty pictures, play *PES*.



1. PRETTY PICTURES

These aren't in this demo. Just like the very first *FM*, it's all about the text.

2. BORED CONFIDENCE

This shows your board's opinion of you. Basically, your chances of being fired that day.

3. SQUAD STATUS

Lists whether your players are fit to play, or whether they're under arrest.

BROTHERS GRIM



WHIZZLE

This scrolling puzzler is a big change from the shooters *UDK* is known for making.



DINO SAFARI

Off-Road Velociraptor Safari (issue 193) is an online game made with the *Unity* engine.

TACTICS



TACTICS

These arrows show what each player on the pitch did during the match. An extremely useful addition, we're told.



MATCH DISPLAY

Henrique passes to cokehead. Cokehead heads to possible rapist. Possible rapist shoots and scores!

BEST OF THE REST



Nearly there. Here's the pick of the rest of the stuff that's packed on this issue's DVD...



ZOMBIE SHOOTER 2

sigma-team.net

From the people who brought you *Alien Shooter* comes this top-down shooter/RPG hybrid. Brilliant fun – even if you've had enough of the walking dead.



THE DARK MOD

thedarkmod.com

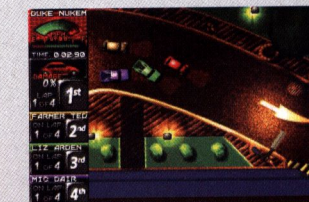
We featured this *Doom 3* total conversion last issue. It's a must if you're a *Thief* fan. Or even if you aren't.



ASTEROID COMMAND

snipurl.com/kroggfish

Steve's tales of making *The Hat Game* inspired David Brinnen to make his own games. Here are all three: *Asteroid Command*, *Pong-ish* and *Pong-ish2*.



DEATH RALLY

3dreams.com/rally

Made back in the days when 3D Realms actually finished games they started making, *Death Rally* is a violent version of *MicroMachines*.



18 WHEELS OF STEEL EXTREME TRUCKER

extremetrucker.com

This demo gives you one hour's access to the full truck simulator. How extreme is this demo? "Do the job well or you might die trying!" screams the game's website.



ALAN WAKE

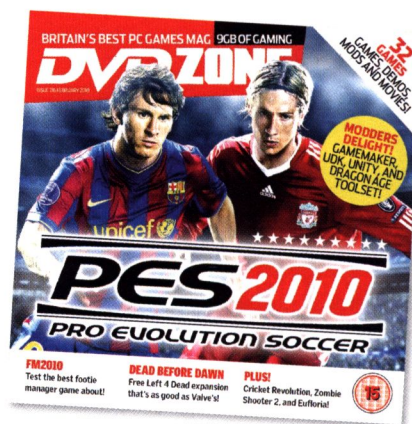
www.alanwake.com

A load of *Alan Wake* movies have appeared, including the opening cinematic. That means the devs have made at least five minutes of the game. Now, if they finish another 10 hours by 2012, we'll be content.



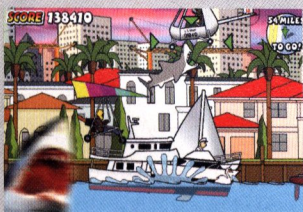
Freeware

Adam Glick finds some free fun and games



This month we go on a spooky quest with a possibly insane artist; beat weird things up in a South American cartoon style; go on a bug hunt with a dictionary; suffer a sore arse and get frostbitten thanks to a kid's bike; and give people new reason to fear carcharodon carcharias.

GLICK'S PICK



MIAMI SHARK

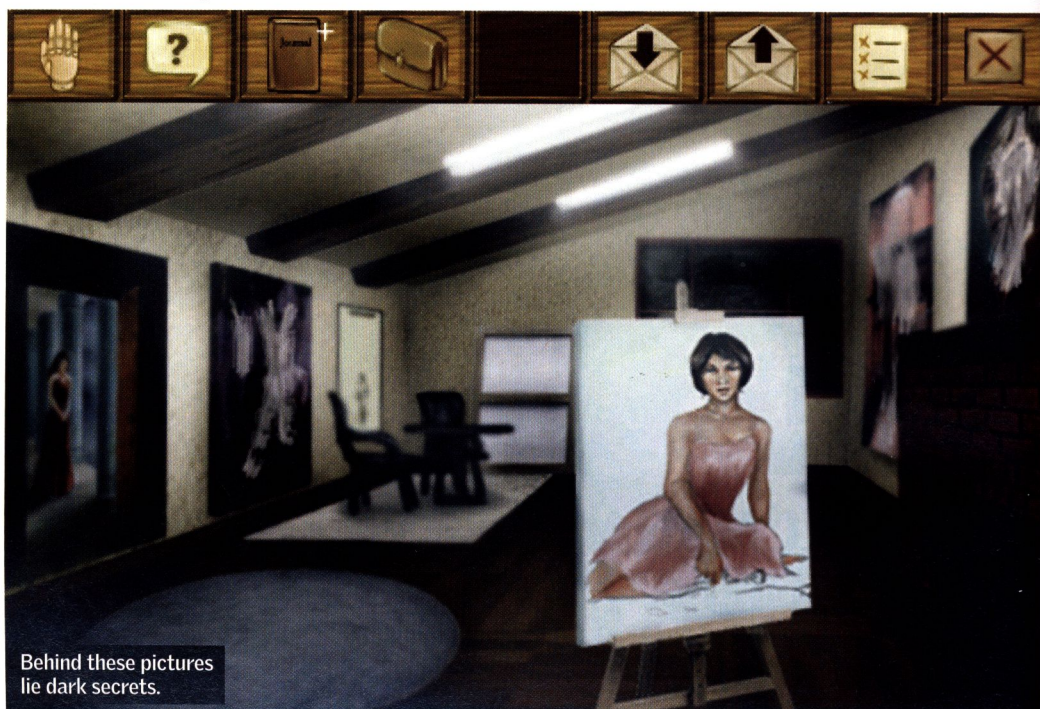
DEVELOPER Mausland.de
WEBSITE snipurl.com/miamisharkgame

MIAMI MIGHT BE better known for its ridiculous crime rate, various themed resorts, being criticised by Stephen Fry on that programme about America he did, and for Don Johnson's slip-on sockless loafers, but it should also be known for its impending armageddon due to the attack of a ruthless killer shark. Nothing is safe, not even B-52 stealth bombers and 747s bearing space shuttles that happen to be passing just over the water.

As the titular great white menace, your job is to terrorise the locals, be they ensconced in simple banana boats or travelling the skies in jumbo jets. Seabound objects are easier to destroy. Just jump above them and destroy them by landing on top. Aircraft are trickier propositions – you have to dive deep and leap out of the water, chomping on their undercarriage and then dragging them down to the water.

Miami Shark is mindless fun, but the fact you're a shark just makes it funny. That's why it's Glick's Pick, suckers.

It doesn't mean I'm any good at it though. A friend of mine wiped out my score on a computer that can't even run *Flash* without juddering to a halt.



Behind these pictures lie dark secrets.

THE MARIONETTE

Like a puppet on a string...

DEVELOPER Team Effigy WEBSITE themarionette.game-host.org

IF THERE'S AN intriguing or good quality adventure out there in Freeware land, it's very likely that it'll end up as the lead piece in this section. *The Marionette* is both of these things, a solidly made adventure with an intriguingly developed story.

You play a downbeat sculptor trying to find some inspiration so he can start a new piece of work. Failing to do so, he takes a break and collects the mail. Inside the only piece of mail he's received is a gloomy photograph of a grimy room full of nooses. For some reason, the sculptor collapses, waking a while later to discover himself outside a strange house in the middle of nowhere.

His car is nearby, with no keys in the ignition, and he can't remember how he got to the house, nor any reason why he'd want to get there.

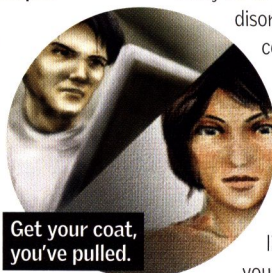
The game plays out in your traditional 2D flick-screen fashion, with a slightly fiddly screen exit mechanism that can disorientate. However, considering that flick screeners are a pet hate of mine, the fact I enjoyed playing *The Marionette* testifies to its pulling power.

The atmosphere is lightly oppressive, leaving you feeling constantly uneasy about the situation you're in, the flick-screen mechanic making you feel more helpless than you'd otherwise be. The music is perfectly balanced, never loud nor ignorable. The developers have,

it could be theorised, spent so much time making sure the game is just right, they forgot about the puzzles a tiny bit.

They're not bad at all, but on a few occasions I was completely stuck as to what to do. Maybe I'm just being thick, but a little more prodding would have been useful, as getting bogged down in a two scene area with seemingly nothing to do is one of the most frustrating things you can encounter in an adventure game.

Still, as far as spooky point-and-clicks go, this puts some of the commercial releases we've seen in recent years to shame, perhaps just because genuine care and attention has been put into the project. This has been a labour of love for a while now, with a demo floating around on the internet for ages. Adventure fans would be mad not to give it a go.



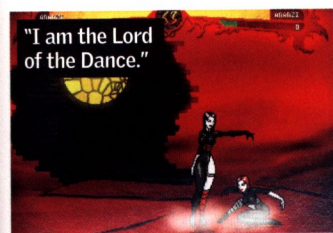
Get your coat, you've pulled.

THE BLACK HEART

Fatalities, Argentinian-style

DEVELOPER Andres Borghi WEBSITE theblackheart.com.ar

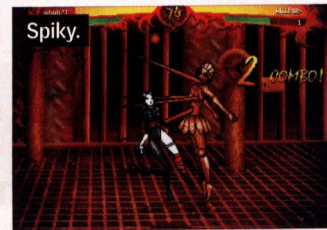
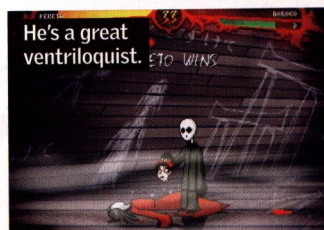
HE MIGHT BE Argentinian, but his game is certainly influenced by Oriental horror. There's the *Ringu*-style faceless girl, who creepily has hands appearing from the bottom of her dress (kimono?) to attack you. There's also the just-as-creepy lunatic



child Peketo, armed with a knife and a desire to stab.

Being a 2D beat-'em-up, it owes a lot to *Street Fighter*. In fact, *Black Heart*'s special moves are straight out of the "roll right, roll left" school, with virtually all of them involving that treasured set of buttons. They're not completely responsive though when playing, so on a high difficulty setting, the AI will kick your arse when the game fails to register you've attempted a move. Annoying, but par for the course in fast-paced action fighters.

It's been in development for years, but the graphics are pretty bad.



They've got a style of their own and one thing you can't accuse them of is lacking atmosphere. There's a definite mood there, plus Borghi impresses with the variety of fatalities/big damage moves. The Shar-Makai slug beast vomits grey slime over his

enemies, Peketo goes on an inner city stabbing spree (although this is nicked from *Street Fighter IV*'s Gen) and Noroko (*Ringu* lass) conjures up deadly ghosts and visions. There are only six characters, but those who couldn't afford *SF4* might want to try this.

CLOCKWORDS

Verbose and voluminous verbiage...

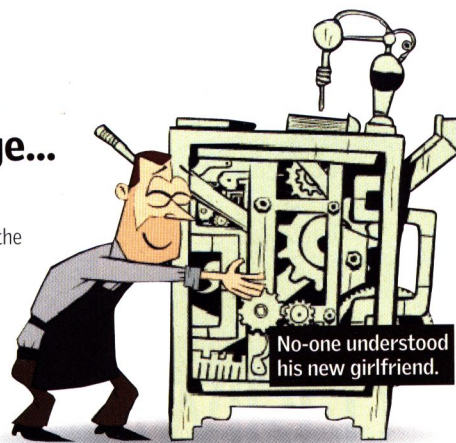
DEVELOPER Gabob WEBSITE www.clockwords.us

I WAS GOING to put a load of references to John Cleese's 'classic' comedy, *Clockwise*, into this piece, but someone further up the chain decided it would be silly. So you won't have any at all. Except that one.

Anyway, this *Flash* game isn't in any way about madcap adventures starring a moustachioed man who's trying to get to a headmasters' symposium. Instead, it's all about testing both your mental agility and typing skills as you think of as many words as you can.

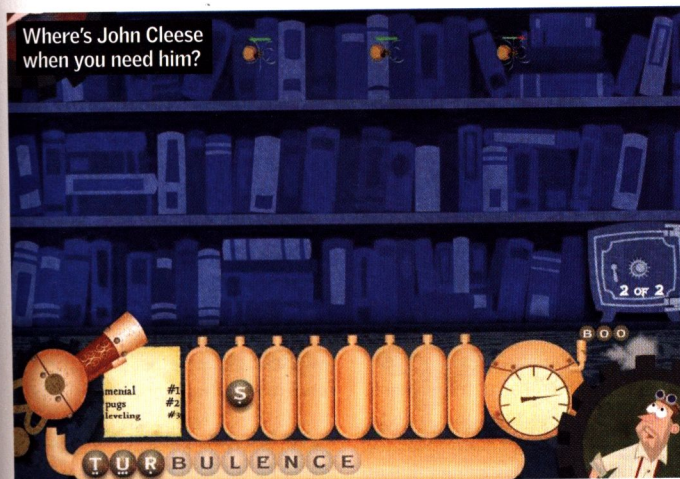
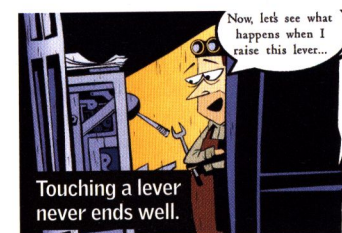
It isn't just the length of the words that makes the difference, it's all about making sure you use the random letters the game assigns to you in order to maximise damage done.

An evil inventor is trying to steal some coded documents from you and you've got to use your newly invented word-obsessed contraption's cannon to destroy his mechanical bugs. If you don't play well



enough, they steal your documents and you lose.

While repetitive, *Clockwords* is addictive and an attempt at depth has been jammed in there, with the ability to combine letters to create rarer ones that do more damage if used in your words. The further you go into the game, the more bugs come at you and the faster you have to be. This is just a Prelude too, with more episodes planned to expand the storyline, such as it is. Like *Clockwise*, fun in spurts.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



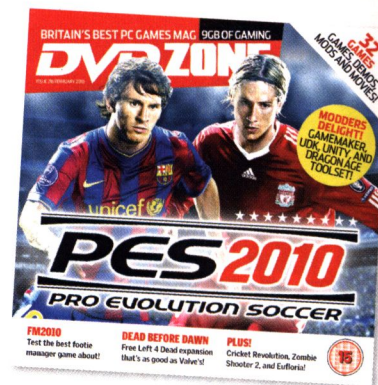
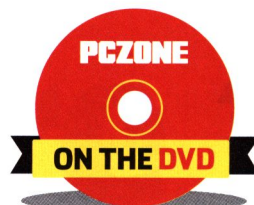
ICYCLE

DEVELOPER Damp Gnat Games
WEBSITE dampgnat.com/icycle

THE WORLD IS a frozen ball in space and everyone is dead. All hope is not lost, though. There's one guy still alive, miraculously. He's naked and he's stuck to a child's bicycle, but he's still there. All he has to do now is avoid the various icy perils in his way, from pointy stalagmites to deadly chasms, and collect as many bubbles as he can. Once he's past eight stages, he's free to sit back and revel in his status as Saviour. Of course, there's probably no way he'll actually survive, given that the game is really hard.

Press the right arrow key to move forward, up to jump and left to slow down. You can't pedal backwards though. Complete *iCycle* without dying once and we'll hail you as the gaming god you are.

Extend

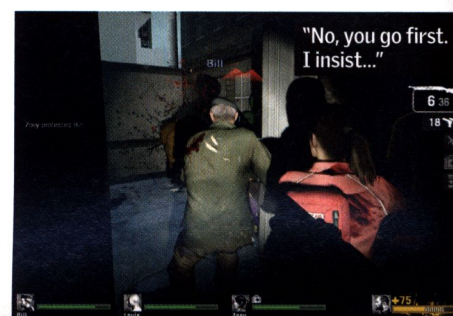


"Zombies! Zombies everywhere!" screams *David Brown*

DEAD BEFORE DAWN

Into the mall of the living dead

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/dead-before-dawn](http://www.moddb.com/mods/dead-before-dawn)



THANKS TO AN overly enthusiastic Keith Pullin occupying my space a few months ago, my first playthrough of *Dead Before Dawn* was blighted by the fact the Infected were constantly screeching like the *Teletubbies* (issue 214, page 113). It kind of puts a dampener on the atmosphere when a Boomer squeals "Eh-Oh!" just before chucking his rancid guts up all over you. However, if you do get to hear the proper new sounds, it all works rather well and you find out that *Dead Before Dawn* is one of the best campaigns out there for *Left 4 Dead*. Well, kinda...

Let's deal with the good first. First of all, the levels are very well designed, challenging even on Advanced and full of new prefabs and scenery. It also has daylight levels, which will fuel the "Could *Left 4 Dead 2* have just been released as an expansion?" argument.

There are also some intriguing puzzles that all have the "push button to spawn horde" theme, but twist it slightly by extending it to "push certain buttons (plural) in a certain order to achieve the same".

Then, of course, there's the shopping mall, the bit everyone wants to play through. In fact, one might argue that the length of time it takes to get to the mall will annoy some players, considering it's why they bothered

"A lot of work has been put into trying to create a new experience"

downloading it in the first place. Regardless of that though, the pre-mall levels are fun too, if more generic than we'd have liked. Nevertheless, the mall is where things pick up significantly. There's a bit where you go into a canteen and there are four screens



hanging from the ceiling. On them plays the *L4D2* demo's intro movie, which is a nice touch. The mall is full of similar touches like this, although let's perhaps forget the Real Zoey sex doll shop. It's these elements and other new additions

show that a lot of work has been put into trying to create a new experience, not just a cut-and-paste job.

The problem is that, at the moment, the campaign isn't exactly user friendly. Installation is a bugger, even if you follow the instructions, because they're

(at the time of writing) unreliable. Plenty of people are finding that it'll only work if they ignore the client-side instructions and use the server-side ones instead. There's also a number of crashing and optimisation issues, plus some set pieces which, while interesting in an unexpected way, can annoy by instantly killing players.

This campaign is still in beta, and feels like it was rushed out to get in ahead of *L4D2*'s release, but it's still fun. It's not the jaw-dropping experience we were lead to believe, but it's solid and a lot of thought has been put into the design. We'd still recommend *Death Aboard* above it but, if you can stomach a 1GB download, it's worth a shot.

OUT OF HELL

Seven years of waiting

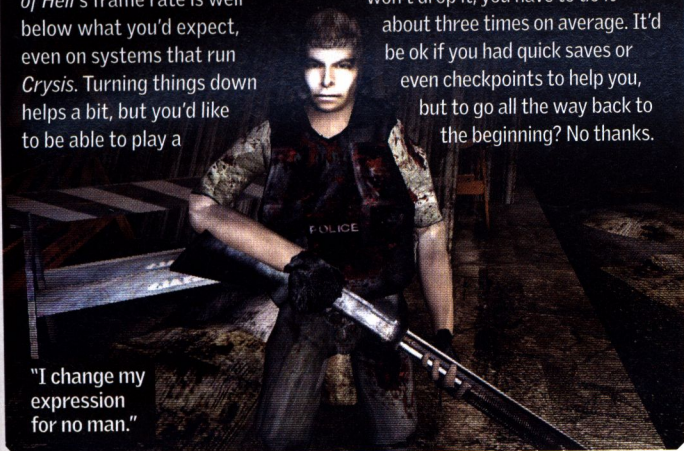
MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 2004 **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/out-of-hell

YOU'VE GOT TO give Long Nguyen a lot of credit really. To stay with a mod for seven years takes a lot of dedication, but he's finally released this *UT2004* survival horror mod onto an unsuspecting public. It's just a pity it might not have been worth the wait.

Don't get me wrong, the graphics are superb, for a *UT2004* mod, but performance issues will be sure to plague many. In pushing the game beyond its original limits, *Out of Hell's* frame rate is well below what you'd expect, even on systems that run *Crysis*. Turning things down helps a bit, but you'd like to be able to play a

mod for a game this old on any modern system. Nevertheless, Nguyen has pulled off an impressive feat, so credit where it's due.

Another problem is it's too bastard hard, but not in a good way. Die and you go right back to the beginning of the level. There are no checkpoints and only people with the steeliest of nerves will get through to the end. It's OK for a mod to be difficult, but this is just ludicrous. Also, hitting a zombie in the head won't drop it, you have to do it about three times on average. It'd be ok if you had quick saves or even checkpoints to help you, but to go all the way back to the beginning? No thanks.



ABSENT GRAVE

Slo-mo undead shenanigans

MOD FOR Max Payne 2 **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/absent-grave

APPARENTLY, THIS MOD took more than two years to create. It's difficult to see how, as it's effectively just four survival maps and some new skins. Still, it's fun for a little while.

Playing as some guy who isn't Max, you have to defeat a constant wave of the walking dead on four custom maps. The first is a small chapel, the second a generic American suburban neighbourhood, the third some offices, and the fourth is a swanky apartment.

The standard *Max Payne* bullet-time action remains, it's just got zombies

instead of mafioso. As you'd expect, the more zombies there are, the harder it is to survive and the tenser it gets.

The main problem is that there's no timer or score to give you an idea of whether you've survived longer or more successfully than before, so there's no real need to replay a map once you've had a go at it. This is a big shame, as it could have been a worthy addition to the *Left 4 Dead* clone mods had this element been included.

Still, there's fun to be had here, just not as much as we'd have liked.

CSS SCI-FI 3: HARDWIRED

Gordon does the can-can

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/css-sci-fi

WE KNOW THAT we say this mod is for *Half-Life 2* above and it is, but it also needs *Counter-Strike: Source* installed to work. It starts off so well too, with a clone of Gordon Freeman – now with added *Duke Nukem*-style kicking action – having to defeat the Combine over a huge collection of maps, all of which are used in *Counter-Strike: Source* and such.

The pity is the gameplay when you get into one of these levels through the brilliantly designed hub area is so boring. I mean, antlions? Seriously? Aren't we all fed up of them? Despite the good idea, this mod is actually a bit dull.



MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



GTA GHOSTBUSTERS

MOD FOR GTA: San Andreas
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/gta-ghostbusters

It might have a lot of stuff planned for the future, but this mod is, at the moment, a total waste of time and bandwidth. It contains, wait for it, a shit jacket, a Ghostbusters car and "new in-game art design". Yay for everyone, in particular the buffoons who thought this would be good.



Driving the buggies is fun.



"Home, home on the range..."



"Just bloody die, will you?"

RENEGADE X

Adam Glick gets involved in the Nod scene...

MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 3 [WEBSITE: renegade-x.com](http://www.renegade-x.com)

THAT SO FEW mods get picked up on by the general public is a great shame. There are the obvious ones that capture the imagination of enough players that they gain regulars who begat more regulars who... well, you get the idea.

At the moment, *Renegade X* isn't one of those mods, despite oozing a sheen and quality that few possess. It's still only on beta 0.4, but its vistas are impressive, its gameplay is probably about correct (with, no doubt, some balancing issues to sort out), and its concept tried, tested and beloved by more than you'd imagine. But, at the time that we tested it, no bugger was playing it.



Ah, memories...

As far as I'm able to tell – having played, but not being an experienced veteran, of the original *Command & Conquer: Renegade* FPS that was released way back in 2002 – this is a near-faithful reproduction, except with flashier whiz-bang visuals and a nicer Hand of Nod.

"It'll look rather spectacular when a full-blooded battle is raging"

The levels are pretty huge and as I couldn't find an sprint button, it takes a while to traverse them. They naturally feel empty when you're literally the only person in the world playing the game, but if you squint and try to use your imagination a lot, you can just imagine 64 players duking it out with tanks, flamethrowers, and such.

Every time you spawn, you start off as a regular grunt, but if your team has managed to protect its Harvester, you'll see your battle funds account slowly

ticking over. Going into one of the buildings at your base and accessing a computer brings up a list of units to purchase using these funds.

All the classic *C&C* vehicles and classes are there and – again with the help of our imagination – it'll look rather spectacular when a full-blooded battle

is raging. There's one gripe we do have with the units, though. The cloaking system for stealth units doesn't seem to be too effective. My cloaked vehicle moved within targeting range of the enemy base and was fired upon by the automated defences. So much for the element of surprise.

One other thing that becomes apparent, from having nobody to play with, is that teamwork will be vital if you're to succeed. Vehicles and buildings take an absolute age to destroy with just

a solitary minigun or rocket launcher whittling down the damage metre. With a Nod buggy's light machine gun, it took us about five minutes to destroy a opposing Harvester, so the help of others is crucial.

To use a footballer's cliché, at the end of the day all we can do is point at *Renegade X* and say "Play it, play it now!" a lot. There's no reason why it shouldn't be a success, as it is stable, looks good and has that *Battlefield* feeling of grand combat. But until we actually find a substantial number of players on at least one server, it's difficult to make an actual judgement call on this mod's quality.

Still, there's a lot of time to go and improvements to be made before we'll consider righting it off. It's your job to make sure we don't have to.

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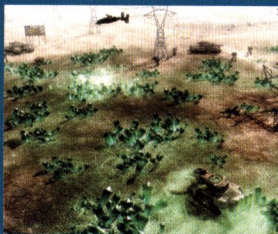
Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

A hard rain's gonna fall on *PC ZONE* this month, as our Fight Club was washed out by some devilish Versus shenanigans on *Left 4 Dead 2*. There's also the usual nonsensical ramblings in Zone Chat and Twitter; a predictable BioWare love-in; plus the forumites get another chance to vent their already strained and distended spleens about yet another PC gaming topic, that's caused them consternation and heartache.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



IT TAKES A long time to make a magazine and one of the things that takes up the most of said time is coming up with all the witty jokes and amusing straplines that fill these pages. Making light of herbs and *Windows* file extensions is something we don't like doing, but we were forced to. See if you can find out where this joke is. We're so wacky, it might not even be in this issue of the magazine. You don't win a prize or anything, but we'd like you to look anyway.

We also found that video of that stupid kid self-harming because he couldn't hold his own in *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer game. Even Steve's been doing well on that, so sorry child, you must be one hell of a loser, even without the ridiculous video.

Finally, we also had time for a whine about Tiberian/Tiberium/whatever it's called. And we revealed that *C&C4* is called *Tiberian Twilight*. This is fine, so long as there aren't any references to teenage vampire romances, or any need to see Kane dressed up as a sexy corpse.

More will be appearing on twitter.com/pczone, or you could just follow @pczone to make things easier.

FIGHT CLUB

Server of Doom

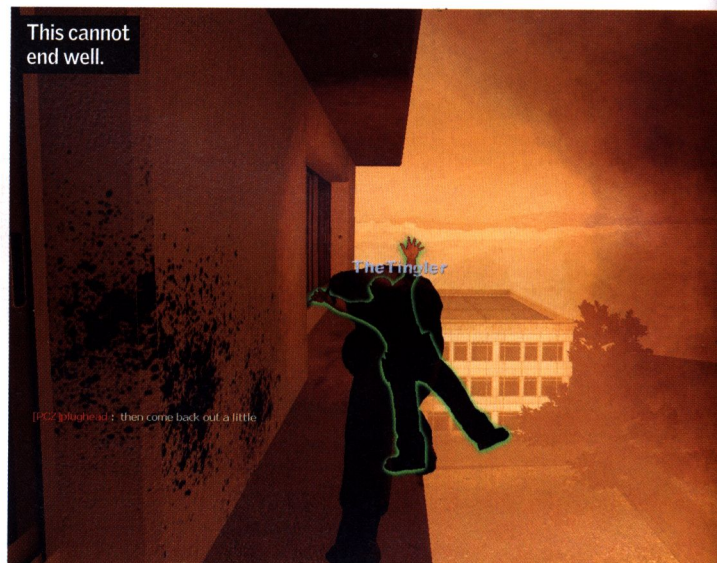
JUST A QUICK word about the abortive nature of this month's Fight Club, which was good up until the point the server decided to just shut down. It's a problem that's been plaguing *Left 4 Dead* since the very start and, it seems, Valve or whoever needs to be looking at this is no closer to solving it.

Ask yourself how many hours you've wasted on games that have randomly stopped for no apparent reason and you might be surprised by the answer. It boils the blood, to say the least. However, in this case, the connection at Zone Towers also thwarted our efforts, deciding to bomb out at the least opportune moment and cripple our Infected efforts.

The decision was made to christen our *L4D2* Fight Club with a Versus run-through of *Dead Centre*, the first of the game's five campaigns. It's the one with the shopping mall and the burning building at the beginning, if you're memory is slightly fuzzy about these things. The reason we chose this is because Steve hadn't played any of the other campaigns, so we didn't want to spoil things for him.

Teams were randomly selected and the match began. It wasn't long before the first survivor bit the dust, as the starting level gives the Infected an advantage, but only if they can make good use of the narrow window ledges

This cannot end well.



"We were left so angry, we just went home to sulk"

the survivors have to traverse. David, as a Charger, snuck up behind the survivors and bowled one off the edge of the building, collecting the Long Distance Carrier achievement in the process.



Overall, it was a bit of a disastrous start for Steve's survivor team and worse was to follow, as a combined Spitter goo frenzy and various Jockey attacks thwarted their escape efforts. David's team was decidedly more

successful, although [Very]Useful Dave also performed a Charger assault off a ledge to take out one of the team. Yet a relatively painless trip to the safe room was finally made, with shouts of despair emanating from the opposition team.

The rest of the game went by in a similar fashion, as Steve's team struggled against the superior opposition, and came up short each time. Still, this doesn't mean David's team had it all their own way, although time and again the design of the levels thwarted the Infected, especially the problem of a team managing to rush to the safe room because the Infected can't spawn in open areas.

After two and a half rounds of tense Versus action, our internet link failed. We don't know what happened to the others, but we were left so angry, we just went home to sulk.



| Versus Mode Scores | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Your Team | | Enemy Team | |
|  | Completion Score: 145 |  | Completion Score: 145 |
| | Survival Bonus: 0 | | Survival Bonus: 0 |
| | Chapter Score: 145 | | Chapter Score: 145 |
| | Campaign Total: 0 | | Campaign Total: 145 |

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Is *Dragon Age: Origins* really all that?

MUSICALGIBBON: Well, I finally picked this up. So far it's been pretty positive. I'd say it's basically *Baldur's Gate*, with 10 years for them to refine and tweak the GUI and gameplay, and 10 years for me to tire of the same repeated characters and story tropes. That said, I'd take that over almost any other RPG of recent years, seeing as I did really enjoy *Baldur's Gate*.

THETINGLER: I'm not very far in, but I'm enjoying it. Considering you (and Alistair) are supposed to be super-soldiers, it's amazing how difficult some of these fights are. I would've installed the patch which is supposed to even the difficulty a bit, but a lot of people have had so much trouble with it that I don't want to risk it.

MUSICALGIBBON: The difficulty is pretty much all over the place. It's not too tough, in fact in parts it's one of the only recent games to get difficulty right, it's just, in places, very badly thought out. Dungeons have a tendency to wildly fluctuate their difficulties, especially when it comes to the boss fight.

Speaking of which, has anyone found any proper tactic for the bosses, yet? So far I've just been using the Benny Hill method of using the taunt ability with Alistair, and then running him round, followed by the boss, while my mages artillery bomb the boss. Surely there has to be more to it than that?

BAGSABBIS: I'm playing on Hard and am not finding the difficulty too much of an issue. Whilst there have been plenty of fights I have had to reload for, it has been a fun challenge trying different tactics out. One of the things that made me rant at the monitor when playing the *D&D* games was the way an enemy party would all make their saving throws, and then two seconds later everyone in my party would fail theirs.

CHO-KONNIT: I may not like fantasy novels, but I like a good fantasy game. Last one that really grabbed me was *Morrowind* and I thoroughly enjoyed that one. Everything I've seen about this game makes it look like it's right up my street.

ANDY_MONAHAN: I like how there is the occasional nod here and there to the other origin stories that you can play.

This came home when I was clearing out a certain base and stumbled across a dead body in a cell.

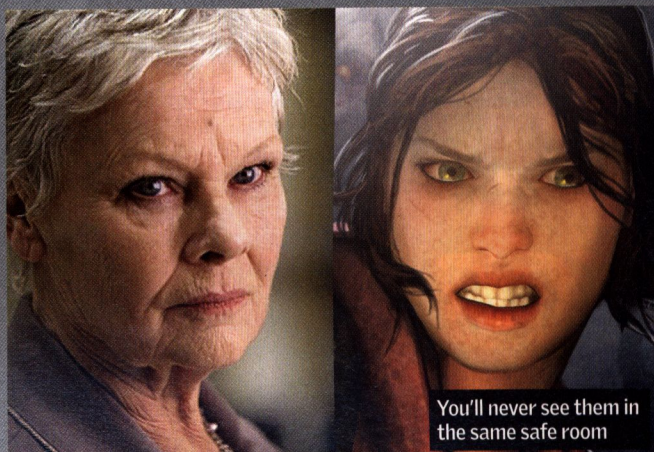
SHAKERMAKER07: Gah! I decided to wait until Christmas to buy *Dragon Age* and on PS3 too. Life is hell.

Dragon Age's elves: definitely not fey folk.



ZONE CHAT

Zoey Fox?



IT SEEMS TO be all zombies this month, with the *Fight Club* being taken over by *Infected* and *Zone Chat* filled with shambling living corpses. However, the chatters were less than enthusiastic about the sequel to our favourite co-op game, preferring instead to discuss who would play the roles of Louis, Bill, Francis and Zoey in a movie adaptation.

The final list comprised of Jason Statham (Francis), The Rock (Louis), Clint Eastwood (Bill) and Dame Judi Dench (Zoey), although this was a split vote with Megan Fox. One lone cry of Pat Butcher from *Tom113* was quietly ignored. There was a bit of *L4D2* adoration, though it was almost totally reserved for our favourite Terracotta clay friend, Gnome Chompski.

Moving on, poor old [OGHF] BOGiE-uk was confused by David's joke about the next *Star Wars* game being *Rebel Assault 3*, exclusively on the N-Gage. Despite the transparent falsehood of the revelation, noted

by other chatters, BOGiE just would not be denied his terrible *Star Wars* game information.

The conversation moved to celebrating the return of Steve Hill's *NeverQuest*, something we're all pleased about. It seems Steve is more popular than anyone else on this magazine, so we'll have to assassinate him to put a stop to that. See what you've done now?



HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our *Steam* Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have *Steam*, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there *Steam* group for the date of the next chat event...

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to *Fight Club* – perhaps you've finally gone on tour with that goregrind metal band you formed years ago – then feel free to join other *PCZ* readers on these public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
Nick Brakespear [PCZ]flatline
Chris Capel [PCZ]thetinger

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4:

MODERN WARFARE
85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...



Flashback KGB

I'D LIKE TO think you've all heard of this game, but let's be honest, it's unlikely a good percentage of you will have played this one. Maybe I'm wrong. Perhaps ruthlessly difficult adventures about the crumbling end of the Soviet Union did float your boat 17 years ago.

Published by Virgin and developed by ever-reliable kooky French devs Cryo in 1992, *KGB* was a first-person adventure where you take the role of Maksim Rukov, a man whose parents were killed by an Afghan terrorist back in 1983. The game was set in 1991, just before the Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik fell to bits.

You're given the task of investigating the murder of Pyotr Golitsin, an ex-KGB agent turned private detective, who'd

been looking into the case of a load of snuff films and the selling of crack cocaine. There's all sorts of conspiracies going on that blur the facts and make the game a bit confusing, but it's all good stuff. What you get is a sense of the grimness and certainly the danger faced by anyone who crossed the authorities (and, indeed, the criminals) in Russia at that time. The whole game is infused with a grey bleakness that, although perhaps not appealing in an eye candy way, certainly sucks you into the experience.

The problem was that it was just too obtuse, just like so many of Cryo's games. The old mistake of including events and puzzles that had to be triggered or solved at exactly the right time was made when putting this game together. Make a game challenging by all means, but don't make it literally impossible to complete if you miss one tiny little detail hours before.

Having said that, it's still a pleasure to play *KGB* again after all these years. There's certainly a constant feeling of



impending doom and dread when playing. Just like another game I've eulogised in these pages, *Waxworks*, the first-person perspective drags you into the adventure more than if it'd been a LucasArts sprite on the screen. It's a pity so few games nowadays opt for

strength of story and atmosphere over balls out action. There are so many interesting stories and time periods we're missing out on as gamers because everyone's obsessed with gunning down hundreds of terrorists or zombies, or even terrorist zombies, in shooters.

But how? Learn below, Comrade!

If one was to cast your eyes over the stream of swear text and hardcore erotica that is the internet, you might come across a set of websites advertising the fact they have copies of old games freely available to download.

These sites are despicable and evil, funding all sorts of heinous criminal activities and, by their very existence,

cause grown men to beat puppies to death with hammers. *KGB* is on some of those websites.

google.co.uk

If you type in the letters a, b, a, n, d, o, n, i and a in no certain order into the Google search engine, you might find a website that has *KGB* on it. You evil, sick individual.

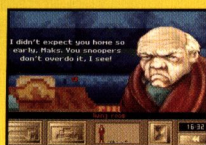


Lenin's Lackeys Just some of the heroes of the glorious socialist revolution...



1 CHEKA PLEASE!

The KGB was once the Cheka, the OGPU, the NKGB and the MGB. Lots of names, lots of spying.



2 THE RELATIVE

Uncle Vanya is an old man, but he has a crucial role to play in unravelling the conspiracy.



3 MAJOR DISASTER

Your direct superior, but not a very nice character at all. Perhaps he's evil...



4 COLONEL SANDERS

Galushkin knew your father and was determined to bring the killers to justice.



5 SISTER SLEDGE

Golitsin's sister knows you're KGB and doesn't like it, but she'll help you anyway if you're nice.



6 ABSENT PARENT

Donald Sutherland played Rukov's father, but made the game worse with his irrelevant presence.

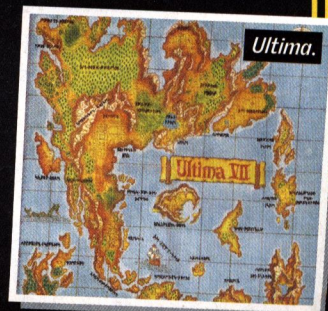
Now & Then

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS vs ULTIMA VII



PRETTY MUCH SINCE the dawn of PC gaming time, RPGs have been sprawling, ambitious efforts, none more so than *Ultima VII*. It's fair to argue that the seventh version of Lord British's Avatar-'em-up was the best one, it was also the last to give complete party control, pretty much, post-expansion anyway. Afterwards, you just had the Avatar poncing about in pseudo-3D in the eighth game, and the less said about *Ultima IX* the better.

Dragon Age: Origins we all know about, right down to the ridiculous blood splatter over characters during cutscenes. *Ultima VII* never had that problem, so why not just damn BioWare's eyes and pick up a copy of one of Origin's finest titles? You owe it to your liege, Lord British, to do so. Just don't try to kill him, he doesn't like it. Yeah, there was (and still is) *Ultima Online* too, but let's stick to the strictly offline remit here, shall we?



Play it! *Ultima VII* is clearly better than *Dragon Age*... actually, that's a complete lie

- 1 This one should be easier to get to run than most games we feature here. If you have an old copy, just try using *DOSBox*. Handily we've put a copy on the DVD. Of *DOSBox*. Not *Ultima VII*.
- 2 If you don't have a copy, you might be able to find one lying around on eBay or some other online auction house place. That's *Ultima VII*, not *DOSBox*. *DOSBox* is free.
- 3 Look, I'm trying to avoid telling you to just go and download the damn thing from some abandonware website. Really, stop thinking about it. Lord British would be miffed if you did.
- 4 Right, that's it, I give up. Just do what you want, I won't stop you. Just be sure that you will burn in purgatory for doing it, and your PC will get various nasty, nasty viruses.

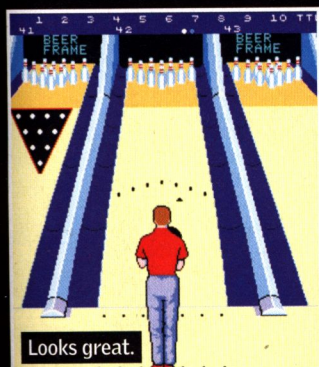
MAMEframe

ALLEY MASTER

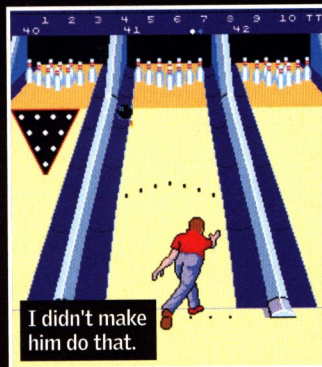
I'M SURE THIS game is really good. I suspect that if you're a fan of bowling it'd be a right laugh. The problem is, like many other MAME ROMs, it just will not work.

I mean, at least this one actually loads up the game, but once you're in, hardly any of the controls work and it seems to be literally impossible to play. What's the point of emulating a game only for it never to actually be playable? Is it just me that sees something strange in that?

You can move your fancifully shoed bowler around a bit and move an arrow, so at least the arrow keys work. But actually getting him to bowl?



Sorry, that's beyond my meagre intelligence. And this was about the 10th game I'd tried to get to work. Rage doesn't cover it. Damn you MAME! Damn you to hell!



Time Charts

UNREAL IS BORN

WAY BACK IN ancient times, or August 1998 to be exact, *PC ZONE*'s chart was compiled in collaboration with Virgin. That's a little fact there you might not have been aware of. It was issue 66 where *Unreal* continued to show it was more than just a fad. Back then, Epic were known for *Jazz Jackrabbit* and *One Must Fall: 2097*, so they had to do a lot to impress people with *Unreal*. But they managed it - winning the hearts of PC gamers worldwide.

Epic subsequently sold its soul to the console behemoths, of course, but it was nice to have them exclusive to the PC for a little while.

Also of interest is the presence of not one but two Titanic-related games in the top 20, although *Starship Titanic* was penned by Douglas Adams and *Titanic: Adventure Out of Time* had characters called Sasha Barbicon and Beatrix Conkling in it. Hardly a promise of a quality title.

PC ZONE Top 20 August 1998

- 1 **UNREAL** EPIC
- 2 **WORLD CUP 98** EA SPORTS
- 3 **COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES** EIDOS
- 4 **CHAMPMAN 97/98** EIDOS
- 5 **ULTIMATE SOCCER MANAGER** SIERRA ONLINE
- 6 **TOTAL ANNIHILATION: THE CORE CONTINGENCY** GT INTERACTIVE
- 7 **QUAKE II MISSION PACK: THE RECKONING** ACTIVISION
- 8 **TOMB RAIDER II** EIDOS
- 9 **MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98** MICROSOFT
- 10 **QUAKE II** ACTIVISION
- 11 **X-FILES: UNRESTRICTED ACCESS** FOX INTERACTIVE
- 12 **TOCA TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP** CODEMASTERS
- 13 **AGE OF EMPIRES** MICROSOFT
- 14 **GRAND THEFT AUTO** DMA
- 15 **MEN IN BLACK** GREMLIN
- 16 **SENSIBLE SOCCER '98** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
- 17 **MIGHT AND MAGIC VI** UBISOFT
- 18 **WORMS 2** TEAM17
- 19 **STARSHIP TITANIC** ZABLAB
- 20 **TITANIC: ADVENTURE OUT OF TIME** EUROPESS SOFTWARE

Back In The Day

UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN

It's been a long time since he's had to fight off a load of Floaters, but **David Brown** always kept his probe within reach

DEVELOPER Julian Gollop PUBLISHER Microprose WEBSITE store.steampowered.com RELEASED 31 December 1993

GAMES HAVE BEEN getting easier for years. Any veteran gamer knows this for a fact. Can you imagine a new Mario game coming out and your average player being unable to progress past the first three screens? That's what happened to me when playing the *Addams Family* platform game on the Spectrum nearly 20 years ago. Now it'd probably only take a couple of hours to finish the whole thing.

In a way, the easing off of the difficulty pedal is a very good thing, but if you were to make *UFO: Enemy Unknown*

easier then it'd be completely ruined.

If you ask any veteran of the first two games – *Enemy Unknown* and *Terror From The Deep* – the first thing they'd say is "Damn, that was some hard shit."

Developed by the renowned British brainbox Julian Gollop (also responsible for classics such as *Rebelstar*, *Laser Squad*, and *Lords of Chaos*) *Enemy Unknown* was set in the late '90s, where a cruel and tyrannical alien invasion force was decimating the populace and causing the *Daily Mail* to write copious bile-filled editorials about interstellar asylum seekers.

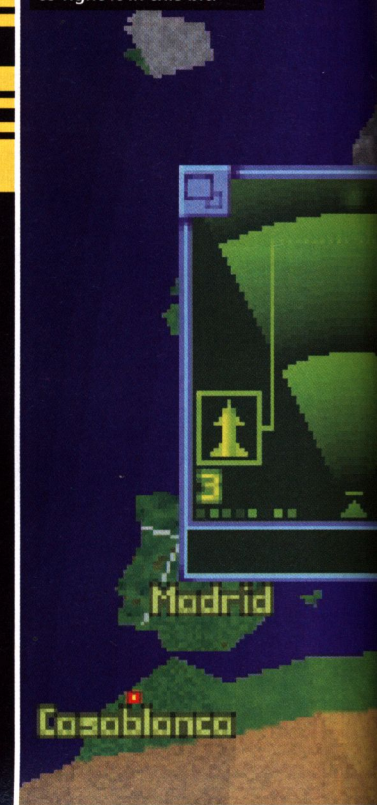
These aliens weren't interested in keeping good, honest, hard-working skinheads out of a job though, they were harvesting humans to turn them into extra-terrestrial soylent green. Somebody had to stop them and that's where X-COM stepped in.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

The game was split into two parts: the Geoscape rotating world map and the isometric turn-based battle sections.

Using the Geoscape you could track alien vessels in real time, discover and assault secret alien bases, and send

Catch a UFO and you get to fight it in this bit.



troops to stop alien attacks on random cities. As well as this, you could build up a network of bases across the world, allowing you to detect and intercept more spacecraft.

The bases were also where you brought back aliens for interrogation/vivisection (if alive) and autopsies (if dead); built labs and workshops to reverse engineer the aliens' gear, that let you build better weapons, armour and fighter craft.

League of Extraordinary Failures

Can PC ZONE save the world?

How would Zoners from past and present fare against a malevolent alien army bent on forcing the Earth's citizens to their knees and inserting strange objects into their orifices? To answer this question, we put them at the forefront of the fight against the aliens, with only their wits and cunning to help them.

Starting with the current team, including those who beaver away behind the scenes, a base was located in the Andes, deep in the jungles of South America. Perhaps not the best place to start, but it felt right at the time. It wasn't long before a small UFO appeared on our radar array and a fighter was despatched to take it down.

Amazingly, it succeeded and the Zoners were sent out to investigate the debris. Things were looking good for the team, with deputy art editor James kneeling to blast a lone Sectoid with a remarkable long range shot. Cheered, they looted the crashed spacecraft and returned to base, where all sorts of back-slapping went on. James was even promoted to Sergeant.

Of course, things soon went horribly wrong. Perhaps they were lulled into a false sense of security, but the team underestimated the threat at the next crash site. Before they knew it, James was dead, a Sectoid hiding behind



a hedge removing his skull with a plasma blast. Keith Pullin was next onto the mortuary slab and a series of comical mistakes, mixed in with some diabolical shooting, meant seven of the eight-person team expired.

Only David was left, cowering behind the wheels of the drop ship. A frantic shootout with a final Sectoid saw David felling the alien, giving him a chance to escape.

The mood was sombre now, but the fight wasn't over. So Martin Korda, Suzy Wallace and Jeremy Wells were recruited to the unit. David had moved up to Squaddie, so he led the team in their next mission.

Karachi was being terrorised by aliens and the challenge was great, but the team was confident, especially with their new motion scanners. Unfortunately, things didn't start out well. Moving onto the exit ramp, David was instantly killed by a lurking Cyberdisc.

With their leader dead, the team panicked. Jeremy Wells was next out onto the ramp and he was instantly killed by the same Cyberdisc. The rest of the team decided to hide in the Skyranger, but more disaster followed. A psychic xenomorph took control of Ed Zitron, forcing him to fire a rocket at his friends. He took out the whole team with one shot.

With the entire squad dead or missing, a new Skyranger drained funds massively. More troops were hired and more

missions were embarked on, but the results were the same: lots of soldiers died. Dave Woods, David McCandless, Chris Anderson and more, bit the dust.

Finally, there were so few Zoners left that a final assault was planned. Eight men were sent into an alien base with newly researched lasers and armour. They were humanity's last hope. Could they succeed?

Steve Hill let the side down by firing at a wall instead of a Floater; Duncan MacDonald stepped on his own mine; and when Rhianna Pratchett was gored to death by a Reaper, only two were left: Jamie Sefton and Will Porter.

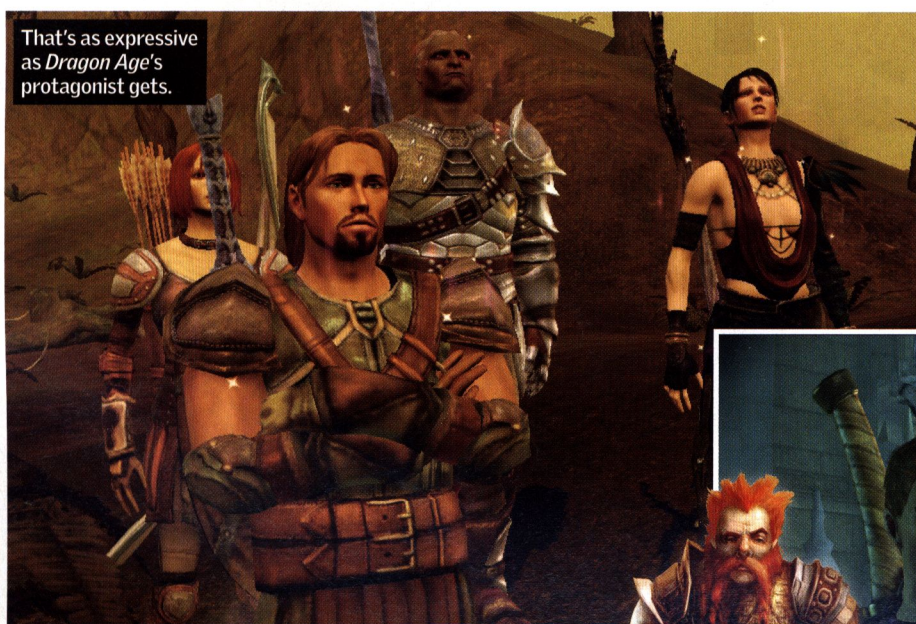
Gritting their teeth, Sefton and Porter fought through the hordes of aliens until they found the complex's control room. Suddenly, a plasma blast whistled past Sefton's head, igniting a power conduit. The ensuing explosion destroyed the complex, burying alive all those inside.

The moral: if you want to save Earth, don't rely on a load of games journalists.

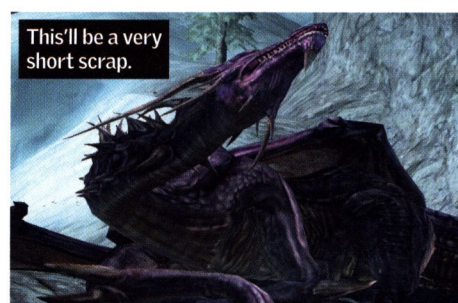


On the PCZ Hard Drive

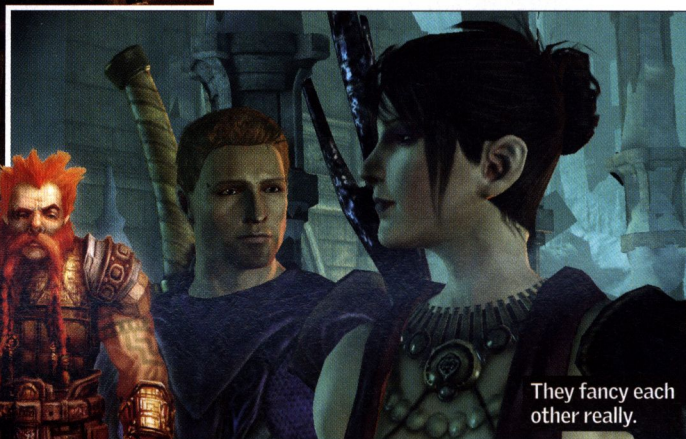
The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



That's as expressive as *Dragon Age's* protagonist gets.



This'll be a very short scrap.



They fancy each other really.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Heroic Bloke: *Richard Cosgrove*

BIOWARE RPGS HAVE a lot in common with marriage: they require a commitment of a vast amount of energy and time, and it's little things that make the difference.

Just like rinsing plates before putting them in the dishwasher and buying milk on your way home helps prevent bitter divorces, it's the yellow, rotten teeth in dirt-encrusted NPCs, senile knights and urinating dogs that turn Ferelden into a living world. More so than the realistic social structures, political intrigue and a detailed pseudo-Christian religion.

These almost insignificant touches make up for the game's legion of weaknesses.

As with all BioWare games, *Dragon Age* needed script editors to force the writers to par down the immense amount of dialogue. Then there's the mute and emotionless protagonist. After *Mass Effect's* cinematic PC and NPC interaction, having *Dragon Age's* hero Gordon Freeman his way through things is depressing.



But more serious are the gameplay and technical issues. There are the minor flaws – such as not being able to store unwanted equipment for later – use it, destroy it, or sell it – and an inventory that thinks a suit of armour takes up the same space as a pair of silk gloves.

Sadly, the biggest flaw is with the combat: it isn't just tough, it can be murderously unbalanced. Some foes (such as wolf packs) can wipe out your team in under a minute, which makes the seconds-long delay between combat initiating and you being allowed to issue commands an often lethal delay.

Add characters who ignore your commands and enemies; opponents that

seem to teleport to outflank you; the inability to alter your party's formation outside of combat; mages' pitiful range of spells; enemies who can't be stopped by filling doorways with armoured warriors; arrows that go round corners to hit you, and melee attacks that inflict damage, even if you run 10ft away before the blow actually lands; and a party limit of just four characters.

This makes *Dragon Age's* suspect support for multi-core CPUs, which can cause the game to repeatedly quit without warning, just insulting.

BioWare deserve the praise they're getting for the rich world they created in *Dragon Age* and the truly epic story you take part in, but it's just a disgrace they didn't put as much effort into the actual gameplay.

VERDICT: Flawed masterpiece

"Combat: it isn't just tough, it can be murderously unbalanced"

MODERN WARFARE 2

Ruining society: **Steve Hogarty**

THERE ARE HUNDREDS of things more offensive than the airport level in *Modern Warfare 2*. And by mixing those things with one another in increasingly offensive ways, the total number of things that *MW2*'s airport level is less offensive than becomes unfathomably huge.

For example, it is less offensive than an identical level in which all of the

civilians' clothes fly off as they get shot. And that's less offensive than a similar level in which only the women's clothes fly off. So you see how, on this scale, shooting polygonal civilians in their faces is almost the most inoffensive thing possible.

On a less facetious note: is it really that big a deal? People have enough of a collective moral compass to prevent

depravity from becoming lucrative. I don't think you'll ever make much money from sliding a digital Berretta into the puckered anus-pixels of a German Shepherd.

MW2's nugget of controversy, I felt, fits nicely within the context of the game's barmy plot. It could've been done better – but then so could the unremarkable level in the airfield – yet

it accomplished something few other games have, of any genre.

This level showed, explicitly, why the *MW2*'s bad guy was a bad guy. No vague threat of nuclear attack, or blurred FMV of him brooding and looking a bit evil, but a proper massacre shown in the first-person. That is, at the very least, original.

VERDICT: I might be wrong



RyanAir's quick response customer service team.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

Top of the Table: **David Brown**

IN THIS ITERATION of *Football Manager* the most popular choice of team, outside of the Big Four, has probably been Notts County.

The unenlightened might wonder why a team languishing in the nether regions of English professional

soccerball would be the must-be team this year. It's because of the fact they're owned by, er, well, nobody really actually knows who owns them. Some sort of amalgamation of offshore holding corporations, Arabic companies and Swiss banks last I heard.

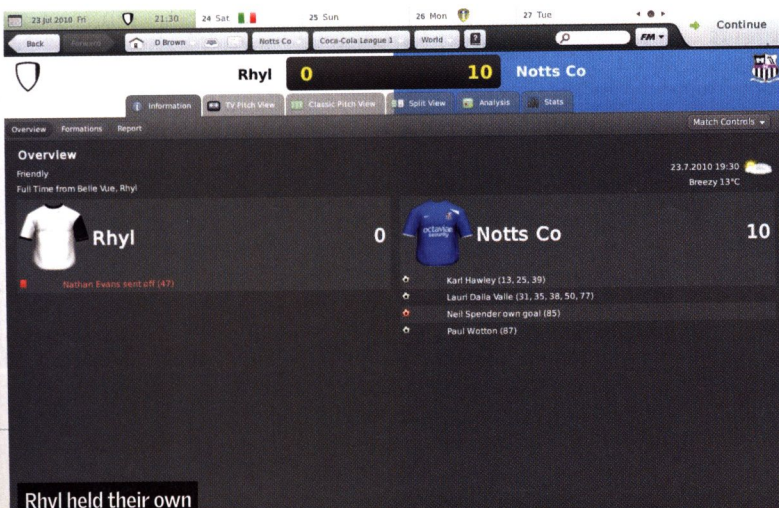
Anyway, just like the FA, *FM*'s fit and proper persons test sees the mysterious men behind the Notts County scenes as being OK, so you get two wedges of money a year to spend, putting you far above every other team in the league.

You're spending £500k on Championship players, while, say, Northampton are scraping together enough Tesco coupons to pay the new YTS trainee. This does make playing the game rather easy, at least until you move up the divisions, but it's also a good way of getting used to all the new systems and strategies that have been

introduced in the new version, all presented, of course, in a now-visually-appealing 3D match engine.

So, another year, another *Football Manager* and another triumph for Sports Interactive. Excuse me for a minute then, I've got to negotiate a new deal for Salif 'The Sheriff' Dia, my midfield enforcer.

VERDICT: Notts a bad game



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

PORTAL

I am in a lull after finishing *Crysis*. Playing a bit of *Portal* while I decide what's next. Probably go back to *Call of Juarez*, which I left off because of playing *Crysis*.

Alberthammond

SYNDICATE WARS

The opening intro may be absolutely abysmal graphically, and the in game graphics may leave just a bit to be desired, but I felt the game still plays pretty well. Someone should make an updated version of this game, I think it would go down well.

Cho-Konnit

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Can't be doing with the hype for the new one so took a step backwards instead. Great, visceral fun, if a little bit shallow.

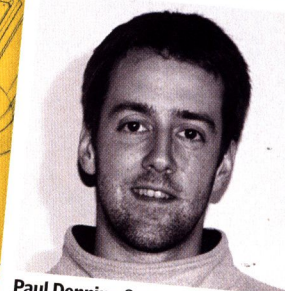
g_hughes

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

The unrelenting *Keith Pullin* continues interrogating Rocksteady over *Arkham Asylum*

ROCKSTEADY GAMES CREATED a monster in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, and senior gameplay programmer Paul Denning is so proud of their game spawn that he just couldn't stop talking to us about it. He spilled so many truth nuggets from his talented maw that we had to split the interview into two parts.

Here's the second bit, complete with all sorts of interesting information about Batman's return to the dance floor, how he nearly had the power to command motorboats, and even a story about how a big film company didn't interfere with the game development process to a significant degree. You see, miracles do happen sometimes...



Paul Denning Senior gameplay programmer, Rocksteady

01 DO THE BAT-TUSSI

"Originally, our forensic system was a lot bigger. We had four months prototyping at the beginning of the project and a lot of the stuff we did for forensics we ended up dropping or leaving out, because we didn't really think it would fit with the way the game was going. If you look at the way the forensics works there's not much of it in there and we felt that any time you needed to learn a mechanic, it would almost be thrown away straight away because you'd be past that section.

"We also had rhythm action combat. This idea was that music was playing and Batman would fight him in time with music. As the camera would cut, a new guy would come in and you'd have to punch him on the beat to connect or you'd end up getting hit. If you had two guys running at you, you'd have to branch off into another piece of music that would seamlessly blend into a combo attack.

"We put all that in and we actually got it pretty far and it was looking pretty good, but it was also obvious that we were running out of places we could take it already.

"We also had this idea where you could pull boats around in the water with your bat claw. We had levels with lots of water where you were turning on valves to raise the water level up and down but we dropped that as well because we felt it slowed the pace right down, and it also involved mashing the buttons a lot."

Thank Christ for resilient undergarb.



Scarecrow. Actually scary.



02 BAT HAPPY

"When it was first announced that we were doing Batman, we were all called into a meeting and to some of us it was really a big surprise. There was instant hollering and whooping. There were some big Batman fans here who were really psyched and there were others who were into it a bit and thought it would be a pretty cool thing to work on. I had read some of the Batman material and seen all of the films but I didn't know anywhere near as much as I do now. You get a bit of daunting feeling as well knowing that it could be huge.

"As the project went on and we started to really see what we were creating and

we started believing that it was going to be huge. Then the pressure started to come from the outside. Once we saw on the forums how all the fans were getting excited, and Warner starting saying how good it was, the pressure increased.

"At the end when we were sprinting for the line and fixing bugs and tweaking gameplay, we all felt that we'd probably made the best game we possible could. This is the best game I've ever worked on, and you never know, for a lot of people this could be the best game they ever work on."



03 CORE IDEAS

"One of the first things that was drummed into us was thinking about Batman, like what are his core facets? So we wrote down all the things that made him great, all the things he'd do and wouldn't do, and the gameplay all evolved from that."

"You start work on the things that are most important. So the things we prototyped first were the combat, the forensics and the predator stuff, and then as we went on we expanded on those and if somebody turned up with a good idea it went in."

"Some things were taken out and it did evolve as we went along. If you took a snapshot at the end of our prototype period, and then again at the end of the alpha, it looks completely different to the final version."

"We started in April 2007 so it took us roughly two years, including four months of preproduction time. It was tight and we didn't start with a huge team, maybe 30-35 to start with and then grew from there."

"For a lot of people this could be the best game they ever work on"

"Smell my shoe. Does this smell like shoe to you?"

LOOKING BACK COMMENTARY

04 SCORE DRAW

"I'm not convinced the Danny Elfman movie score (from Tim Burton's *Batman* movie from '89) would have made our game better. I think it's very iconic, but it's also very suited to the movie, and we're not based on the movie, we're based on everything else – the comics in

particular. We tried to add music that suited the tone of the comics which is closer to the *Batman* universe we had envisioned.

"I think the audio that our sound guys came up with is unique and fits our game very well."

Didn't know Max Mosley was in it...



Old Sharpie's never been happier!

He goes through two bottles of Drano a day.



Arkham Asylum was given a good rating by the health inspectors.



05 NOT SO SUPERMAN

"One of the things that lends *Batman* so well to video games is the fact that he's human. His abilities work well as a game. One game I would never want to work on is a *Superman* game because he's meant to be invincible and yet he's completely crippled by Kryptonite or magic powers. There's no real gameplay there: you're either invincible or you're not. Or, you break all the rules and have him getting beaten up. It just never really works.

"I would like to work on a *Transformers* game. There's a lot of very big charismatic characters in that universe that have gaming appeal."



1m24s around the Top Gear test track.

Those custom rims aren't strictly road legal, Batman.

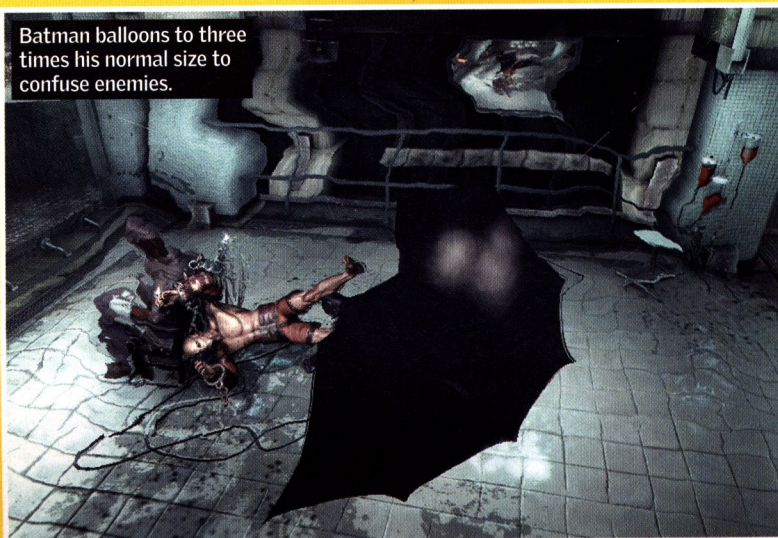


06 BUFFED UP

"Batman's supposed to be the perfect physical specimen. He never gives up. He'll literally go on until everything is put back in its place. He's a tortured soul. He's still tormented by his parent's death. He's scared that it could be him who's in Arkham one day – he could be in Arkham right now, if it wasn't for the fact that he overcompensated by doing so much good in his world. But above all, he values life above everything.

"I mean it's not just the fact that he won't kill – he'll literally try to rescue everybody he can. All the comics try to show this stuff – he's a warrior against the darkness, but he's also very broken beneath and it's a constant struggle for him to stay on the right side and make sure he doesn't go too far."

Batman balloons to three times his normal size to confuse enemies.



07 WORKING TOGETHER

"One of the things that was made clear from the start was that Warner Bros and DC are the Batman experts, but we're the game experts. That is our field. Making this game was definitely a collaborative effort, but we made sure the lines were drawn in the right place.

"We could comment on their stuff and they could comment on ours, but they had to let us do our thing. There are a lot of poor licensed games out

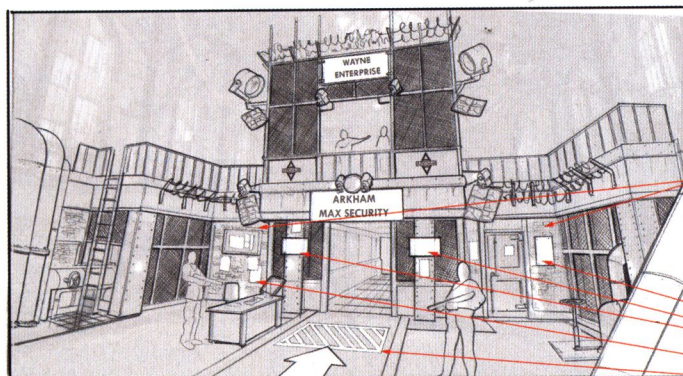
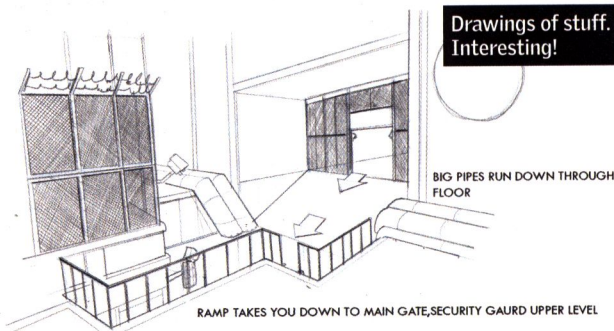
there and Warner Bros and DC have had their share and they really wanted something that would revive Batman as a game franchise.

"I played *Transformers* on the C64, which is a bad memory to have. *Superman* on the N64 is most famous as being a completely wasted opportunity. There have been some pretty bad ones out there, but we really wanted to break that trend."

Better with?
Or without?

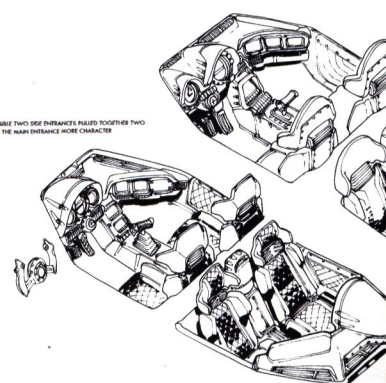


Drawings of stuff.
Interesting!



BATMAN, JOKER, GORDON ESCORTED TO MAIN SCAN ENTRANCE

POSSIBLE TWO USE ENTRANCES FILLED TOGETHER TWO
GIVE THE MAIN ENTRANCE MORE CHARACTER



STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill returns to the *World of Warcraft*



FIVE YEARS. THAT'S how long people have been playing *World of Warcraft*. Governments have fallen, wars have raged, yet still they grind, immersed in a fantasy world of no consequence whatsoever. Or is it?

At a recent awards ceremony, I found myself at the same table as a former glamour model who religiously plays *WOW*, and sleeps all day. In an attempt to justify her addiction, she explained that even if you do nothing else but play *WOW*, at least you achieved something: as once you level up, they can't take it off you. It's an interesting theory, although possibly of wider interest is the fact that the next time you find yourself stalking a pert redheaded female elf, it might be the real thing, as opposed to a Scandinavian schoolboy or a Texan goat farmer.

Five years. Not me though. I chose life (otherwise known as online poker and sleeping all day). Logging in, I learn that my last appearance was in January 2007. Yet patiently my level six Draenei Priest waits for me, bearing a bastardisation of

my name. Launching Stevehill into the world, I'm mildly perturbed to find that I'm dead, and it all comes flooding back as I start this latest caper by looking for my corpse.

Years ago, possibly inspired by *EverQuest*, some numpties recorded a song called *Has Anybody Seen My Corpse?* Despite only ever hearing it once, I can't help but mentally sing it as I search for my three-year-old cadaver.

THE MAN

With spirit and flesh duly reunited, it's business as usual; a massacre of nearby crabs, stags, bucks and Blood Elf Scouts. It's a lonely business, my only companions being a penguin called Mr Chilly and an Onyxian Whelping, awarded to mark *WOW*'s fifth anniversary. Eventually I'm joined by a level 80 horseman called Boomshanka, who sidles up and whispers, "Need a gang?"

Proving extremely useful, he instantly slays any enemies while I casually go about the meat and potatoes admin of the various moribund quests. A member of Queens of the Gnome Age, I later realise that he has been sent by my Activision-Blizzard representative – aka Shandor – who eventually rocks up himself and takes over the bodyguard duties.

Essentially it's like being allowed to hang



"He then asks me, 'Was Mr T outside the starting zone?'"

out with the older boys, and Shandor takes me under his wing, kindly giving Mr Chilly a biscuit, which remarkably doubles his size. He then asks me, "Was Mr T outside the starting zone?" alluding to an earlier email that I took to be a joke.

As ever, truth is stranger than fiction, and Shandor briefly disappears before returning to throw a grenade at me that transforms my hair and beard into a replica of Mr T's tonsorial arrangement.

A quick yomp later, he introduces me to the man himself, who is casually fishing at a nearby river.

"T... Hill," says Shandor. "Hill... T." Which is pretty much how it went down when

I met the Mr T at E3 once... With a Mohawk and a mate,

WOW is suddenly a whole different ball game, and the ever-generous Shandor even gives me some homemade cupcakes, which make me happy. Sitting by a roaring campfire to tuck into them, I contentedly proclaim, "This is the life."

"Want to catch a boat somewhere?" suggests Shandor, and we then skip gaily

through the woods to Valaar's Berth, leaping onboard with seconds to spare.

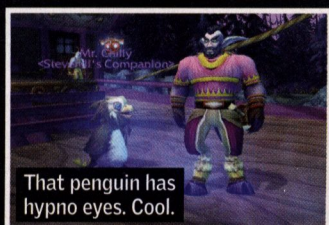
To pass the time, Shandor gives me a go on his Spectral Tiger, which he magics into a child's rocking horse. Allied to the motion of the ocean it's enough to make me throw up my tasty cupcakes. Leaping from the boat, we catch another boat, posing briefly for a Titanic moment before arriving at Stormwind City.

SUMMER HOLS

It's like being on holiday, charging around, taking in the sights, and stopping for snaps. Shandor even has a present for me. "Seeing as you're in town," he says, "I got someone to iron the creases out of it so you don't look like a squaddie." With that he produces a beautiful smock that fits perfectly over my tail and shows a tantalising glimpse of my hooves.

"Genius," laughs Shandor. "Mr T in a dress."

I may look the part, but humiliation follows when it transpires that I'm not at the requisite level to enter the Deadmines with the rest of my new buddies. Minutes later, my laptop grinds to a halt, snapping me back to reality, sat in the dark, staring into the abyss. A mouse skitters across the kitchen floor. This is the life. **PCZ**



Future Publishing Ltd
2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW
Tel 020 7042 4720 Fax 020 7042 4729
Email letters@pczone.co.uk
Website pczone.co.uk

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Editor Ali Wood
Deputy Editor Steve Hogarty
Production Editor Richard Cosgrove
Hardware Editor Phil Wand
Staff Writer David Brown
Art Editor Matt Kendall
Deputy Art Editor James Roff
Contributors Pavel Barter, Jon 'Log' Blyth, Alan Dexter, Adam Hartley, Steve Hill, and Stuart Renton.
Editor - cvg.co.uk Gavin Ogden 020 7042 4311
With thanks to... All our lovely, lovely readers.

EVERYONE ELSE

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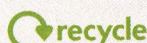
Chief Executive Stevie Spring
Non-executive Chairman Roger Parry
Group Finance Director John Bowman
Tel +44 (0)20 7042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442244 (Bath)

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Contact us

Website pczone.co.uk

Email letters@pczone.co.uk

Post PC ZONE, Future Publishing,
2 Balcombe Street,
London, NW1 6NW

Phone 020 7042 4720

Fax 020 7042 4729

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Winners

Tiny Compo

Winning a copy of Ghostbusters.
214: Dr HR Timothy, Nottingham

King of Letters

Winning an ASUS 9600GT TOP.
215: David Leverno

PCZ Around The World

Winning a mystery prize!
215: Katie Perrine, Altrincham

Resident Evil 5 (online)

Winning a copy of the game.
Mark Giblin, Sheffield; Barry Midwinter, Gloucester; Chris Booth, Angus; Jason Steel, County Durham; Rick Lane, Edinburgh; Jonathan Paynter, Bury; Martyn Clift, Poole; Alan Nash, Wrexham; Peter Savage, Bournemouth; and Paul Boland, Waterford.

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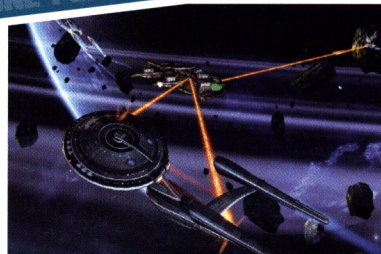
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IS BRINK THE BEST OF 2010?

Splash Damage do it again! We get hands-on with the incredible new FPS!

PCZONE READER AWARDS 2009

The votes are in! The wait is over! See what games are the big winners in our PC ZONE Reader Awards results issue!



HANDS-ON!

STAR TREK ONLINE

We boldly go where no man has gone before and check out Cryptic's MMO!



2010 PREVIEW!

GAMES GALORE

Find out what games you'll be playing in 2010 in the only round-up you need!

PLUS!

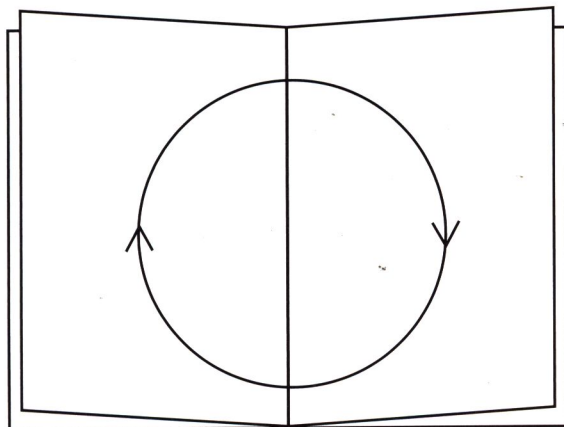
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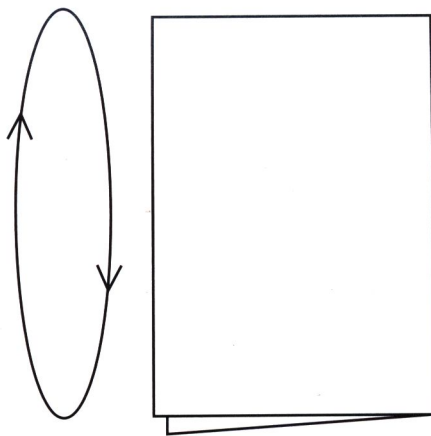
All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. PC ZONE is a tickle mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

Dear Reader,

The rest of the magazine is upside-down. Please rotate the magazine 180° along its Z-axis (Fig1), taking care to keep one hand on the magazine at all times.



Alternatively, close the magazine and rotate it 180° along its X-axis (known as the "PC ZONE jazz flip"). (fig 2)



However, if you've reached this page by reading "forwards" from the "front" of the magazine, and were prompted by the sight of upside-down text to turn your magazine around, then disregard the previous instructions. Welcome to the end of the alternate front of the magazine!

Once you're comfortable with the format, why not try rotating your magazine using some more interesting methods? You could leave your magazine on a fault line, to return decades later when the shifting tectonic plates have twirled your magazine into a more readable configuration. Lazy Susans and Spinning Jennys might also be used to revolve your magazine by mechanical means.

The limit is your imagination, and the availability of Spinning Jennys this late in the year.

Yours,

PC ZONE

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BRIAN JOYCE
SENIOR MERCHANDISING
MANAGER, DELL ALIENWARE

HOW IT BEGAN

Where Alienware came from and where it's heading to now.

Q How did your company get started?

A "Alienware was founded back in 1996 in a Miami garage by two friends and hardcore gamers, who taught themselves how to build their own ultimate gaming PCs out of nonproprietary components. Nelson and Alex soon found that they were making them for their friends and family and, as word spread, lots of others. Which is when they realised: 'Hey, there's a great opportunity here!'"

What point did things start to really get rolling?

"The first system they built got a bunch of good reviews, which was lucky because they had maxed out all of their credit cards on building these machines, and taking out a few small black-and-white ads in *Maximum PC*. Very soon after they got orders. Lots of them."

What makes Alienware different from other PC suppliers?

"From the get-go our motto has been 'build it as if it were your own.' We provide cutting-edge, high-performance PCs for demanding gamers that don't have the time to build their own dream machine. And to make PCs to the same high standards that these guys would have done, if they did."

What have the next few years got in store for Alienware?

"As for the future, we have a 3D display on the horizon, which should be pretty exciting in 2010. Plus, we are seeing a bigger focus on portability. The M15x is very much a result of that. And we have plenty more exciting plans in that area."



The M15x - perfect for gamers on business trips.

THE MEAN MACHINE

For gaming on the go there really is only one choice: the M15x

WHILE ALIENWARE'S 17IN

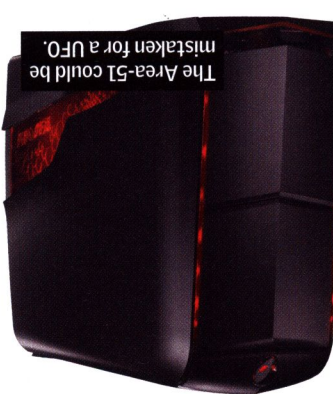
notebooks are, as the company's vice-president Brian Joyce tells us, "all about transportability, rather than portability" its new M15x notebook is ideal for gamers who want a machine they can carry around for day-to-day tasks and for getting in a regular fix of *Modern Warfare 2* wherever they may be. While the M15x may be a shade smaller and weigh a few pounds less than the M17x, tech-wise there are no compromises, with its optional Intel® CORE™ i7 920XM CPU (which can be boosted from 1.6GHz to 2.8GHz using its Turbo mod) and a 1GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 260M GPU married with the high-def widescreen edge-to-edge display. Additionally, you can bump up M15x's hard drive to a massive 500GB on which you can store a veritable library of games and movies to take on the road. It's the ideal PC to for when you're alone in some godforsaken Premier Inn in a foreign town. Plus, all the latest Alienware notebooks come with the *Alienware Command Center* pre-installed. This exclusive software package includes *AlienFX* lighting and *AlienSense* facial recognition, *AlienTouch* trackpad

SPECIFICATION

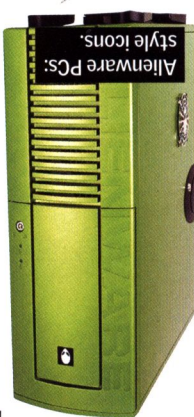
| ALIENWARE M15x | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| PRICED | From £1,199 (inc VAT and delivery) |
| CPU | Intel® CORE™ i7 Processor 720QM |
| RAM | 3GB 1333MHz dual-channel DDR3 SDRAM |
| GPU | 512MB NVIDIA GeForce GT240M |
| STORAGE | 250GB (7200rpm) serial ATA HDD |

controls, and *AlienFusion* power management utilities. The most significant improvement to the new M15x is the build quality. It's both a looker and a sturdy notebook with a notably thicker chassis than its older brethren.

cameras and more. The future looks bright. The future looks like a big green flashing alien head!



2006 DELL MET ALIENWARE
Dell acquired Alienware in May. From then on engineers from both companies began work on designing the latest range of products. Some gamers were critical of Dell's motives in buying a hardcore gaming company, but the latest batch of desktops and laptops have silenced the naysayers. Alienware are looking closely at the growth of the netbook market and such as 3D screens, motion-sensing developments in new technologies



2005 ALIEN AESTHETICS
In this year, the company introduced a unique new chassis design for its desktop systems. These gave their PCs a truly sci-fi Geiger-esque look, in addition to offering gamers access to powerful dual-core processors. It, that meant the portable PC could deliver true gaming-on-the-go.

DESKTOP KILLER

The M17x has all the power you need, with none of the space

THE NEW ALIENWARE

M17x is simply the most powerful 17in notebook computer in the universe. Looks-wise, there are nods to earlier designs, although this one takes after a stealth fighter. Perhaps the most noticeable improvements are in the machine's overall build quality. It both looks and feels considerably more solid, compared to earlier models. Alienware has clearly channelled the extra resources of its new parent company in the right direction, because that new bold anodised aluminium case design is just lovely.

Tech-wise, the machine includes the option of an Intel® Quad Core Extreme overclockable CPU, and an SLI Dual 1GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 280M2 GPU. Essentially, you are getting the power of a decent desktop, but in a form that is a hell of a lot easier to pop in your flight bag when you are heading away from home.

Whether playing games or just watching movies on its 1920 x 1200 widescreen display, the M17x pretty much raises the bar and sets the new standard for gaming notebooks.

The M17x makes a great replacement for your desktop.

THE CUTTING EDGE

Alienware is 14 years old in 2010. Here are eight key moments that mark the history of the hardcore gamers' brand of choice.

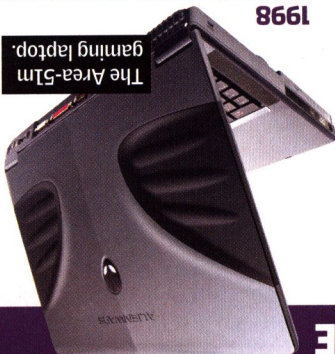
1996 BECOME BEIGE BOX!

Alienware founded in Miami, Florida back by two close mates, and hardcore flight sim nuts, Nelson Gonzalez and Alex Aguilera. The two neighbours were sick of the Identikit beige boxes on offer from major manufacturers such as HP and Gateway which, in addition to looking dreadful, were impossible to upgrade.

1998 BETTER SOUND AND VISION

Alienware introduced the 3DFX/NVIDIA Aureal Vortex2 soundcards for high-performance gaming PCs. These provided compatibility with Direct3D and Glide games. In April Alienware introduced Aureal Vortex2 soundcards for high-performance gaming PCs. These provided

The Area-51m gaming laptop.



1999 WHO NEEDS OVERCLOCKING?

On 7 May, Alienware became the first company to license Wittek3D's Parallel Graphics Configuration (PGC) tech, which allowed two 3dfx Voodoo3 2000 PCI cards to be used in one system, delivering 55fps without the need for overclocking.

2000 ALIENWARE USHERS IN THE NEW CENTURY IN COLOUR

On 28 August Alienware introduced a new range of colours including Nova Yellow.

2001 HYDRAULIC DESKTOP CASES

In November 2001, Alienware introduced the hydraulic desktop case, featuring an unobtrusive front door with dampening gear and hydraulic motion. Almost every other PC manufacturer soon followed suit.

2002 GAMING GOES ON THE MOVE

On 17 April, Alienware launched the first Area-51m gaming notebook. This was the first notebook with a desktop processor in

SPECIFICATION

| PRICE | From £1,599 (inc VAT and delivery) |
|---------|--------------------------------------|
| CPU | Intel® Core 2 Quad Q9000 |
| RAM | 4GB 1333MHz dual-channel DDR3 SDRAM |
| CPU | 1GB GDDR3 NVIDIA GeForce GTX 260M |
| STORAGE | 160GB (7200rpm) Free Fall Sensor HDD |

make your monitor cry

SPECIFICATION

| PRICE | CPU | RAM | GPU | STORAGE |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| From £2,899 (inc VAT and delivery) | 3.06GHz Intel® CORE™ i7 950 | 6GB 1600MHz Tri Channel | 1GB ATI Radeon HD 5870 x2 | 2x 640GB SATA 7200rpm RAID 0 |

other system. Mention should also be made of

highest-end graphics cards available, and still deliver a huge scope for expandability. And all of Alienware's desktop systems – from the £1,099 Aurora through to the £2,899 Area-51 ALX – come with liquid cooling as standard.

AURORA

LIENWARE'S NEW AURORA desktops and the latest in their famous Area 51 range boast overlocked CORE™ i7 processors, pro-level audio, and the


**ALIENWARE:
FROM THE PAST
TO THE FUTURE**

I Over the last 14 years, their machines have always been designed to do what I want them to do – make my games look and feel better than they previously did. As you can see from our history of Alienware overleaf, the company was founded by hardcore flight sim addicts demanding the best bleeding-edge tech. And while their leftfield product design might have the odd detractor its no-compromise use of top-class components, packed inside instantly identifiable futuristic desktop and notebook beasts, continues to set the benchmark for off-the-pag PC gaming hardware. Yet there's an irony at play here. Arguably, it's far easier to build your own DIY killer gaming machine now than ever before, with plenty of decent components and guides available to the eager PC-builder online. Meanwhile, Alienware continue to innovate and knock out stunning hardware that we would happily sell our gamies for.

They thrive and prosper for three reasons. One: the quality of their products. Two: the fact that the worldwide market for PC gaming grows massively each year. And three: there are always plenty of lazy-ass gamers, such as myself, who demand can buy good quality machines that money can't but who don't want to spend the best part of a year sourcing components and then figuring how to put them all together.

After all, why mess around with a troublesome kit car when you can just buy yourself a Porsche?

Adam Hartley
Freelance writer



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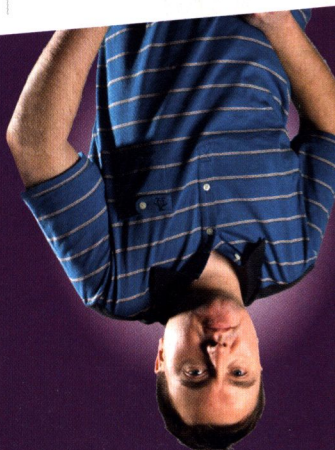
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Hardcore PCs for hardcore gamers

Alienware



Alienware AURORA

Most Powerful Upgradable Micro ATX Latest Intel® Core™ i7-975
Processor Extreme Edition Overclocked CPU
NVIDIA GTX 260 Dual Graphics Card / NVIDIA SLI or ATI CrossfireX Graphics Card
Up to 24GB of DDR3 1333MHz 64bit OS Shock-proof Black Resin enclosure
Up to 2TB3 7200RPM HDD Liquid cooling system
4 controllable lighting zones
allpowerful.com



ARM YOURSELF.



ALIENWARE | ALL POWERFUL

Intel® Core™ i7 processor Extreme Edition, Processing Power for Ultimate Performance.

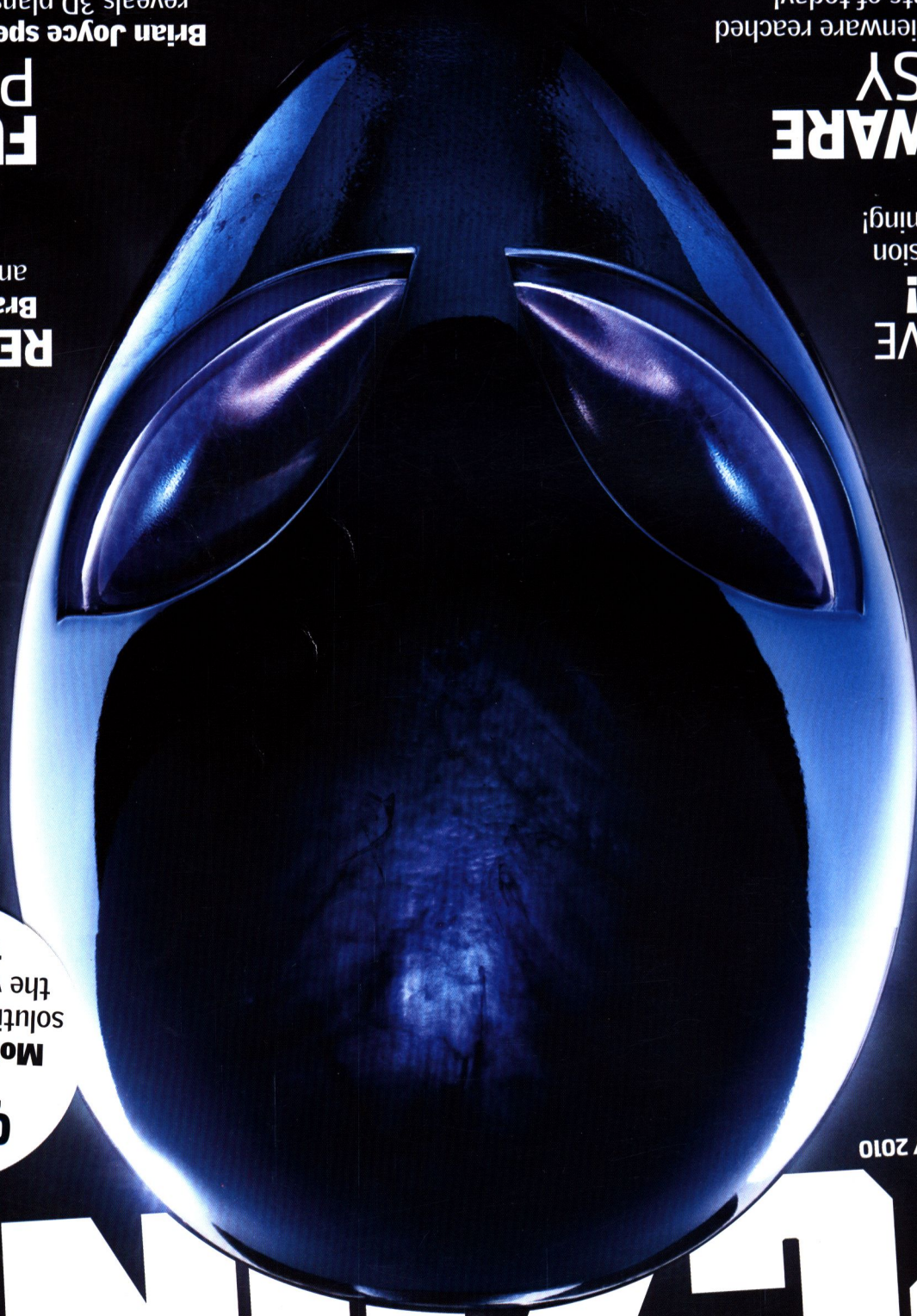
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ALIENWARE AUTOPSY

Inside! How Alienware reached the heady heights of today!

**INNOVATIVE
AURORA!**
Alienware's vision
for desktop gaming!

ALL POWERFUL

ALIENWARE

**HOW DELL BUILT FOUNDATIONS TO GIVE YOU THE MOST IMMERSIVE
AND HIGH-PERFORMANCE PC GAMING EXPERIENCE EVER!**

Brian Joyce speaks! Senior VP
reveals 3D plans for Alienware!

FUTURE PERFECT

REVEALED!
Brand new! M17X
and M15x laptops
blow us away!

**GAMING
TO GO!**
Mobile gaming
solutions to change
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